WE THREE BOYS

OR

A YEAR OF ADVENTURE

BY L. VALENTINE

Whitefield Tabernacle

LEONARD STREET, CITY

This Prize *is awarded by*

to

To Peter

Best wishes
from
G. E. Medcalf

WE THREE BOYS.

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SPEARING THE TIGER.

WE THREE BOYS;

OR,

A YEAR OF ADVENTURE.

By L. VALENTINE,

AUTHOR OF "THE KNIGHT'S RANSOM," "SEA FIGHTS AND LAND BATTLES," "HEROISM AND ADVENTURE," ETC., ETC.

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PREFACE.

SEVERAL of the adventures related in the following tale actually occurred. Some of them are authenticated by the Author's personal experiences, especially the fact of a tiger in full chase passing in dangerous proximity to a carriage; and that of General Sir Charles Napier checking the spring of two leopards by his steadfast gaze.

It is hoped that our readers may find some amusement in this record of the perils and exploits of "THREE BOYS."

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WE THREE BOYS.

CHAPTER I.

IN GREATEST PERIL.

IT is evening; the sun is setting in saffron and rose, and a soft pinkish-grey light is falling over the sea. The tide is coming in fast, but with a gentle murmur, as the waves lap against the rocks. The beach is shut in by the high Cornish cliffs, which, rising steeply from it, fling their frowning shadow over the sea.

At their foot, seated on a ledge of rock, is a boy of about fourteen years old; he is a fine lad, tall for his age, with a good honest countenance—in fact, one might call him handsome, with his bright blue eyes, chestnut hair, and rather chiselled features. He is reading, and is too deeply enthralled by his book to notice the advancing tide, till by-and-bye it laps over the ledge he is sitting on, and runs up to his feet. Then he rises reluctantly, closes his book, and, with a sigh, prepares to return home; but, to his surprise, he finds the beach he has so recently traversed under water. It is too deep for him to wade through, and he cannot swim. He turns back

hastily—he can escape, he thinks, by the beach on the other side of the ledge, it is nearer on a level with it, and will not yet have been submerged.

But on reaching it he finds that it also is deeply covered by the waves, while the water on the ledge itself is already over his boots. He looks round him in dismay: there is water everywhere, except where the mighty cliff raises its precipitous side behind him, and over all the tranquil sea there is no sign of a boat, save a distant sail in the horizon.

He notices by the wet seaweed high up on the side of the cliff that the tide will rise presently far above his head. There is no other escape than by climbing the cliff; he must try it, but he looks up hopelessly at it. He dwells a mile or more from the sea and the cliffs, and though he can climb the highest tree in his uncle's park, he has never tried to clamber on the rocks, and this is an awful ascent to make. He pauses, and cries loudly for help; but none comes, and now the water is up to his ankles. Again he cries out, but his voice is only echoed by the rocks. There is no help coming to him, he thinks bitterly; he must perish there or dare that dreadful cliff's side. Well, it looks impracticable, but it is at least a chance; and he might perhaps reach a narrow ledge he can discern some distance up, and stand there till he is seen by some passing boat. He begins the ascent. It is not as difficult as he feared. There are projections and twigs he has not noticed, which help him. He goes on. He has reached at last the distant ledge. It is only wide enough for him to stand on, and he wonders if it is beyond reach of the sea. He fears not, for there is seaweed on it.

Encouraged by his success thus far, he determines to

continue his ascent at once. Had he only known it, the ledge *was* just above high-water mark; but he did not, and resumed his climbing. He is midway up the cliff now; but, alas! it has been increasingly difficult to mount. The earth crumbles under his feet; the face of the cliff grows more rocky and smooth. There is no hold farther on. He stands where he is, and looks up hopelessly. The cliff bends over him at the edge, as if to crush him. He can go no farther, and in despair he utters once more an agonized cry for help.

This time it is heard. Some of the visitors to the neighbouring watering-place are walking on the top of the cliff. A gentleman looks over it at the sound, and cries,

"Good Heaven! there is a boy clinging to the cliff, half-way up it."

The others crowd to the spot; amongst them the coastguard man, with his glass under his arm.

Exclamations of horror and pity are uttered by all.

"Oh! how *can* he be saved?" that is the general question.

One gentleman calls for ropes to be brought. "We must throw him one," he declares.

The coastguard man shakes his head.

"He could not catch it," he said, "or put it round him as he stands. Some one must go down to him; but it is awfully dangerous."

Several people had meantime run off to get ropes and aid from the town.

"Could not a boat be sent to him?" asked a visitor.

"No, sir," said the coastguard man, "it could not get in over the sharp low rocks there; and besides, he could not get down to it. Look how helplessly he clings: he has lost his nerve, poor little chap!"

And now the people are returning, bringing ropes from the coastguard-station, and men. Accompanying them is a tall stately gentleman, well known to most of those present as Captain Regan of the Royal Navy, and with him is his son, a midshipman of about fifteen, a tall powerful lad, with bronzed skin and laughing eyes.

The ropes are now on the cliff, but the men agree with the first coastguard man that it would be useless to throw a rope to the boy. Some one must descend to rescue him.

The coastguard man (first named) gallantly volunteered to go ; but he was a large heavy man, and they demurred as to the rope bearing him and the added weight of the lad.

"A boy could do it—no one else," said one of the preventive men. "If my lad were here, he should go ; but he 's at Plymouth."

"I will go," said the midshipman, stepping forward.

Captain Regan laid his hand on his son's shoulder. "You could not do it, Lance," he said nervously.

"Yes, father, I can. Please remember that I am a born cragsman, reared in Ultima Thule," with a smile. "It is to save a life, father!" eagerly.

Captain Regan sighed. "Well," he said, "then, go, and God keep you, my brave boy."

"Thank you, sir," said Lance simply. Then advancing, he said, "My father will let me go, men."

There was a deep murmur of applause as the boy drew off his boots and stockings, and threw off his hat and jacket, and the preventive seamen then fastened the rope round his waist, leaving a long loop for him to extend to the boy, if *that* should be possible.

Captain Regan anxiously examined the knots of the rope to be sure all were taut and safe, and then they

LANCE DESCENDING TO SAVE HAROLD.

proceeded to assist Lance in getting over the cliff. The spectators, who eagerly crowded the very edge of it, held their breath as they saw him hang free against the side, and the rope was paid carefully and slowly out.

He keeps himself cleverly from being beat against the side of the rock, and now—now he is close over—now he is beside the boy, and clutches his jacket collar in a strong grasp. The rescued lad too by a despairing effort catches at the rope. Lance throws one arm round him, the other holding the rope, and then he whistles; the signal for drawing up. They begin to draw in the rope, and there are so many strong helping hands that it ascends rapidly, and the two boys stand on the cliff at last—safe.

Then a burst of wild cheering goes up from the crowd, and Lance's father steps forward and speechlessly grasps his son's hand; every one rushes up to do the same. The brave boy is overwhelmed with praises and congratulations.

Meantime, however, the rescued lad has sunk under the reaction, and lies white and faint on the grass.

A lady and a little girl are beside him. The lady is holding a scent-bottle to his nose; then the men bring her a flask furnished by one of the visitors, which she holds to his mouth, and he revives and gets up hastily, though still white and sick; he is sadly ashamed of that very natural swoon.

"Where is the fellow who saved me?" he asks, passing his hand over his brow; "where is he?"

"Here! here!" cried the little girl, running to Lance, seizing his hand and dragging him from amongst his surrounding admirers, "here he is."

The boys clasped hands. "I don't know how to thank you," said Harold, faintly.

"Oh, there's no need," said his deliverer; "it was nothing."

"Nothing! You saved my life! I was so giddy just then that I *wanted* to jump off into the sea. Another minute, and I should have done it; but I saw you coming," and he shivered.

"It must have been hard for you," said Lance.

At this moment there rushed up to them another boy of about the rescued lad's age, who grasped Lance's hand also, and exclaimed,

"Oh, I say, Lance, it *was* brave of you!"

"Nonsense, Dick; you would have done the same, you know, if you had been here."

"Oh, I would have wanted to, but I couldn't. I should have been too giddy to see," protested Dick.

"Ah, that's because you were not born in the Shetland Isles," said Lance.

Just then the child who had dragged Lance over to the rescued boy pulled his jacket. He looked down at her, and saw a sweet little face upturned to him, and a soft voice said,

"Brave boy, I want to kiss 'oo because 'oo so good."

Lance laughed and blushed, but bent down and kissed the little creature, who put her arms round his neck. Her mother, who was standing by, said,

"Pray forgive my little girl, Mr. Regan. She is very intrusive; but she was so dreadfully excited about you, and so anxious for you."

"Yes," said the little one, "and all the time I said 'Our Father' for you; and so God saved you both."

"That is the very truth," said Captain Regan reverently; "and," raising his hat, "we owe Him thanks."

Then, turning to the boy, he said,

"Young gentleman, I hear you do not live in the town; you had better therefore go home with us, and have a cup of tea.

"Thank you!" said the lad, "I should be glad to do so; but I have a long walk home, and I am late now."

"Still, I think a rest would be advisable, and perhaps a fly home, after such an adventure."

"Do come," said the lad Lance had called Dick. "I know you live at the Raven's Nest, and it's a good walk there. Come home with us, and I am certain my father will send you home in the carriage. He attends Sir Jasper, you know."

"Are you Dr. Lovelace's son?" asked the boy eagerly. "Oh! then I will go with you and have a cup of tea, for I am awfully thirsty."

"And Lance who saved you, and his father, are staying with us, you see; so we can all talk the event over together. Captain Regan—Lance,—this is Harold Sinclair, Sir Jasper Sinclair's nephew, whom you have saved, and he will go home to drink tea with us." And Dick almost cut a caper with pleasure at the thought.

As the three boys moved to leave the cliff, another great cheer rose; and the coastguard man came up and said to Lance,

"Before you go, sir, I should be proud to shake hands with you. You're in the navy, sir, and I shall be glad at any future time to serve under you."

Lance shook hands cordially with his brother sailor, and then they moved away and descended into the town to the house of Dr. Lovelace, a handsome dwelling on the Esplanade facing the sea.

Here they were welcomed by Mrs. Lovelace, a very pleasant charming person, who, when she heard their

story, kissed Lance with tears in her eyes, and warmly welcomed Harold, whom she had known—as Dick had—by sight for a long time; but by sight only hitherto, as the lad visited no one, and made no friends.

He came daily into the town to his tutor's, but he was never seen about the place after he left the tutor's lodgings, except by the boatmen, for he always ran off to the sea-shore if he had any time to spare. Harold's passion was the sea. He had gone thither, as we know, to read in his favourite place a book his tutor had lent him—"The Last Days of Pompeii"—and had been so absorbed in it, that he had nearly been engulfed in the waves he so fondly loved. That he was, however, glad to make these new acquaintances was manifest from his radiant face, as the boys led him into the drawing-room.

"How cleverly you kept us from striking against the cliff!" he said to Lance.

"Oh, you see, ever since I was a brat I have been used to the cliffs. I was born in Shetland, and there boys go over higher cliffs than these—or as high—for the sake of birds' feathers and eggs. I thought nothing of going over; I was only anxious about being able to get at you; but you were as agile as an acrobat."

"It was a despairing effort," said Harold—"that or death, you know. Enough to make a fellow agile! Are you in the navy?"

"Yes."

"How delightful for you! I do so want to go to sea," sighed Harold.

"And won't your people let you?" asked Lance.

"I have only an old uncle," replied Harold, "and he will not hear of it."

"That is unlucky," said Lance: "I think if one has a

great longing for the sea, it is a pity not to enter the service. What are you to be, then?"

"Nothing," said the boy, rather bitterly, "except a gamekeeper; that is part of my occupation at present."

Lance wondered, but did not like to make any remark, as Dick, who was leaning over the back of the sofa, pinched his shoulder. Just then a little rosy-faced girl ran in.

"Oh, Lance!" she cried, "how brave and good you have been! Did you——" Then seeing the young stranger, she paused.

"Yes," said Harold, smiling at her, "he pulled me over the top of the cliff. It *was* good of him."

"Why were you so silly as to go and stay till the waves got round you?" she asked, fixing her brown eyes earnestly on him.

"I was reading, and did not notice that the tide was coming in," he said.

"But then you might have swum round the point."

"I cannot swim," said Harold.

"Then you must learn: Dick will teach you. Lance, we are to have honey for tea!" suddenly: "that is to reward you!"

The boys all laughed.

"Edith," said Dick majestically, "we have souls above honey."

"Oh, Dick! you know you like it better than anything," reproachfully.

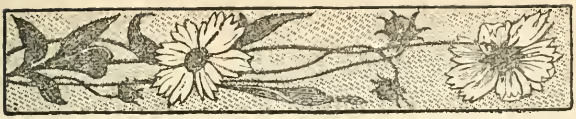
Dick laughed.

"But," she went on, "mamma sent me to tell you that tea is ready, and papa will be in almost directly; so come as soon as you like." And little Edith ran off again.

Dick then led the way into the dining-room, where they found Mrs. Lovelace presiding at a table covered with all kinds of dainties—honey amongst them—and Captain Regan standing by her.

"Your father is come home," she said to Dick, "and will join us directly; but we will not wait for him, as Mr. Sinclair will no doubt be anxious to get home, lest his uncle should hear of his danger and be alarmed."

Harold smiled a little bitterly, but said nothing, and sat down quietly between Dick and Lance.



CHAPTER II.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE WATCH.

HAROLD did not go home that night.

When Dr. Lovelace had heard the story, and noticed that the rescued lad could not eat a morsel of the capital meat-tea spread before them, he felt his pulse, and declared that instead of sending Harold home, he would drive over to see Sir Jasper himself.

"And Mrs. Lovelace," he added, smiling at the sweet, kind, motherly woman, "will have a bed made up for you—we keep our beds always aired—and you must go to it at once, Harold, and take a composing draught, or you will suffer again, in your dreams, the horrors of the past few hours."

Harold declared that he was "all right now," and need not give Mrs. Lovelace any trouble; but the doctor would not hear of his return home, and the lad had to obey him.

He went off to bed, while the doctor started for the Raven's Nest, as old Sir Jasper's place was called. He requested Captain Regan not to sit up for him, and advised that Lance and Dick should follow Harold's example, and go to bed after their excitement; but they only laughed, and when he returned at about eleven o'clock, he found them still up.

"Well," asked Mrs. Lovelace, "what did the old gentleman say? Was he not thankful for his heir's escape from death?"

"Thankful!" cried the doctor scornfully, "I really believe that he would not have cared if the poor lad had been dashed to pieces! All I could get out of him was 'What business had he there?' and, 'I hope his rescue won't cost much!"

"It won't cost anything," said Lance, reddening.

"So I told him," answered the doctor; "I said that a young gentleman had saved Harold, and that officers in the navy were paid only by thanks. Then he grew quite eloquent, and begged me to tell you that he could not thank you enough; that you were the bravest of boys, and would doubtless be a great man."

Lance laughed merrily.

"What a queer old chap he must be," he said. "But, I say, Dr. Lovelace, I didn't know that there were any misers nowadays. Does he keep his guineas in his house and count them every night?"

"No, my lad, that kind of miser is gone by. The miser of the present day hoards that he may invest, and instead of counting over his gold, watches the rise and fall of his investments. But it is really shameful," he went on to Captain Regan, "the old man will not send Harold to a public school, or to either of the universities. He has had him educated by an old tutor who lives in Pengarven, and gives daily lessons at a low rate. The boy walks in to them daily; I expect he was taking a longer road home for the sake of a walk by the sea to-day when he got caught by the tide. Sir Jasper will neither educate him nor give him a profession. He said when I once urged it, 'No, no, Dr. Lovelace. When I die he

will come into my property, for it is entailed, and as I can't do anything with it after my death, I choose to do what I like with it in my lifetime, and he may be very grateful to me that I don't waste my money.' In vain I told him that, for Harold's future position, culture and education are indispensable. He replied scornfully, 'What culture would he get at Oxford or Cambridge? All he would learn there would be to spend money—my money, doctor.' But, I urged, he must have a profession. It is so bad for a lad to have nothing to do all day. 'There's plenty for him to do,' was the reply, 'he can keep the accounts of the farms for me, and shoot the game. I don't choose to pay a keeper, with a great lad like that about the place.' Of course it was of no use for me to say more."

"It is an awful shame," said Captain Regan; "he seems a fine lad, too."

"He is a first-rate young fellow," said the doctor, "honourable, gentle, devoted to reading and study of all kinds. He has a taste for drawing and sketching, but his uncle won't buy him pencils or paints, so the gift is cast away in great degree. I gave him a paint-box myself one day, and he has found old parchments in the muniment-room, which Sir Jasper said he might have. It is extraordinary the talent he has; if cultivated, it would make him a great artist."

"What a sad position for the poor lad," said Captain Regan.

"And it may go on till he is middle-aged," went on Doctor Lovelace, "for Sir Jasper, though in feeble health, takes a great deal of starving."

Dr. Lovelace did not fully know how mean Sir Jasper Sinclair really was. Poor Harold was often badly shod,

his boots patched by the village cobbler, his jacket threadbare, his under-linen of the coarsest. It took all the old housekeeper's loving care to keep the poor boy even decent. It was quite "treasure trove" when he discovered in a garret of the old rambling mansion some ladies' velvet dresses of the centuries gone by, from which good Mrs. Brown manufactured him jackets, while from the fine old Dutch linen sheets she made his undergarments. If it had not been for her care also, the heir of the Raven's Nest would often have been cold and hungry, for Sir Jasper never had a large enough fire in his own grate to warm himself, and never allowed a sufficient supply of meat at his table. Harold was always being lectured on his inordinate appetite, and was often glad to take a trout from one of the streams, to Mrs. Brown, who dressed it for their supper in her room.

Sir Jasper kept only this old servant, a girl, and a man. The place was let go to ruin, for he never repaired the old house, or permitted the labourer, whom he called a gardener, to cultivate anything but vegetables.

Therefore Harold, who had a taste for gardening, had himself dug up and tended the once beautiful "Pleasaunce," where, thanks to his care and the delightful climate, the roses and lilies bloomed to perfection. Gardening, fishing (in its season, shooting), and reading were Harold Sinclair's chief occupations. There was a grand old library and picture gallery in the house, and in these he was free to revel, for Sir Jasper never entered either. He had a private study of his own, with bureaux for his share receipts and coupons, in which he read the report of the money market, and studied everything about the existing state of affairs in all lands which were the creditors of Europe.

He had long since fallen out of the county society, refusing all invitations, and returning no calls; therefore Harold was not acquainted with any one but Dr. Lovelace, who was often at the house in attendance on Sir Jasper, whose health was feeble.

The next morning the three boys met at breakfast, and again fraternized. Dr. Lovelace had brought word from Sir Jasper that Harold might dine with Captain Regan, and the boys were delighted to hear that he (Captain Regan) intended to give them a dinner at the hotel, and to take them to a circus, which was in the town, afterwards. It was Dick's holidays—he went to the grammar school in the town, and it was now vacation. Lance, who was a naval cadet, was on a visit at the house with his father—for Captain Regan and Dr. Lovelace were very old and dear friends.

Captain Regan had married a beautiful and well-born Shetland lady, and when this princess of Thule died (as she did when Lance was only three years old), her family had taken charge of her orphan babe, and brought him up, till he went on board the *Britannia* training-ship. His education had been entrusted to a clever tutor who lived in his grandfather's house, and who had prepared the boy admirably for his examinations, without the necessity of cramming. But in his play-hours young Lance had gone out on the cliffs with the Shetland boys, and had, as he said, become a good cragsman, an accomplishment very valuable to him in his future profession, and, as we have seen, in other circumstances also.

Captain Regan gave the boys a first-rate dinner at the hotel. Many of the delicacies presented to them Harold had never seen before, and, boy-like, he enjoyed them greatly. After dinner they went to the circus, which

was a very good one, and the first entertainment of the kind also that Harold had ever seen.

"This *is* jolly," he whispered to Lance; "my life was worth saving, as I am to have so much pleasure in it."

By-and-bye they saw a little fair-haired girl of about seven years old nodding violently to them from a seat a little way off. It was Lance's small admirer. The boys returned her greeting cordially, and as they went out of the circus, her mother joined them. She was a Mrs. Mordaunt, a woman of large fortune, the wife of a general in the army, who was then absent in India, from whence she had returned with little Ella for the child's education and health. She spoke to Captain Regan, and repeated her invitation to his son and his friends.

"Can they spend the day with us to-morrow," she asked, "or the day after?—I mean all the three—and we can have a day in the woods."

The invitation was accepted for two of the boys, and Harold said he knew Sir Jasper would let him go if he asked him. The next morning, therefore, the friends parted, with the hope of a speedy reunion.

Sir Jasper received his nephew on his return home after his peril with a growl.

"So, sir," he said, "you have been climbing the cliffs, and risking other people's valuable lives, as well as your own. I suppose you have torn your boots to pieces?"

"They are a little scratched, that is all," said Harold.

"Well, don't let me hear of any more tricks of that kind, wearing out your clothes unnecessarily. You are expense enough as it is, without such risks."

"Uncle Jasper," said Harold, "why need I be an expense to you? Why don't you let me earn my own living? I should be glad to do so."

"Hold your tongue, sir! Earn your living, indeed! You couldn't do work enough to earn your salt. Be content and thankful for your home, and see what you can do for me, to lighten the burden of feeding and clothing you."

And with these words Sir Jasper dismissed his nephew. But when they met in the evening at dinner, he was more amiable, and was quite pleased that Harold should go out for a day again—"it saved his food"!

They had a merry day at the Mordaunts'. Mrs. Mordaunt drove them into the great woods which sheltered her house on the north-east, and there they dined, under the green trees. They rode donkey races afterwards in the meadow—and, in short, they had a thorough day's fun, pleasure as well as danger thus drawing the boys together. They walked back to the town in the twilight, talking of all conceivable things, amongst which the future held a considerable place.

Lance spoke with enthusiasm of what he should see and do at sea, while Dick made jokes about being "a Sawbones," and discovering absurd remedies for poisons; but it was of Lance that poor Harold felt bitterly envious. He loved the sea with all his heart. His happiest hours had been spent upon the beach, and whenever a good-natured boatman had given him a sail he had been perfectly happy.

"Ah!" said he, as Lance spoke of the ship he was about to enter as midshipman—a smart corvette—"if I could only go to sea! Do you know the waves seem always calling me, Lance?"

"Like Dick Whittington, eh?" laughed Dick Lovelace. "I advise you not to listen to them, or you may be 'married to a mermaid at the bottom of the sea,' as the song

says. I lay any money Lance never heard them calling to him. Did you, Lance?"

"No," said the boy, "I didn't; but I love the roar of the waves too, Dick."

Harold sighed deeply. "And I must always live on shore, and only dream of storms, and calms, and the beautiful lands far away," he said disconsolately.

"Never mind," returned Dick consolingly, "by-and-bye you will be master of the Raven's Nest, and then you can fit out a yacht and go round the world if you like."

"But I may be an old man then," said Harold.

To this there could be no answer.

The boys parted that night, to meet again next day and the day after; in fact, the three were never happy asunder.

"May we three boys have a swim together?" "May we three boys go to fish together with old Ben the fisherman?" "May we three boys have mother's pony carriage to drive to the cricket match at Redlands?" was so often repeated that little Edith Lovelace at last nicknamed the boys "We three," and used to ask where "We three" were whenever she wanted Dick.

"We three" were greatly delighted when one day Mrs. Mordaunt called at Dr. Lovelace's, to ask Captain Regan to allow his son to go to the Assembly Rooms to receive a watch which was to be presented to him by the residents and visitors in the place, in acknowledgment of his recent act of bravery.

The boys of course were all present on this memorable occasion, and both Dick and Harold were very proud when handsome Lance came forward to receive his gift from the hands of a distinguished old admiral who lived in the place.

"I have great pleasure, my lad," said the brave old sailor, "in presenting you with this gift, a public acknowledgment of your generous courage in risking your life for another; and I beg to inform you that you will receive, in September next, the Royal Humane Society's medal for the same. Take this watch, sir, and use the same coolness and self-devotion for the service of your country, in the noble profession to which you belong."

Lance, crimson with mingled embarrassment and pleasure, took the watch, which was a splendid gold one, and then in a clear voice said,

"I thank the givers of this splendid present with all my heart, though I cannot think that I did more than my simple duty. I shall keep it in remembrance of their kindness, and as a reminder to deserve it."

A cheer from the assembled spectators answered him, for the hall was quite full; and Lance, bowing and blushing, found himself surrounded by people eager to shake hands with him, "Exactly," Dick assured him afterwards, "as if he had been Tom Thumb, or any other monstrosity."

The boys were eager to examine the watch, which they found bore the following inscription:

"Presented by the visitors and residents in Pengarven to Lancelot Regan, of Her Majesty's Navy, in acknowledgment of his heroism in rescuing a lad from death on August 12, 1870."

This gift, nobly deserved and generously given, was destined hereafter to save Lance's liberty, if not his life.

With its presentation Captain Regan's pleasant visit to his friends ended, and he and Lance had to return to Portsmouth to join their respective ships. Captain

Regan's was to sail for the East Indian station, Lance's corvette for the Mediterranean.

The boys parted with great regret.

"Oh, Lance, how we shall miss you!" said Harold sadly.

"You'll write often, won't you, old fellow?" cried Dick.

They each had a hand of Lance's in their own.

"Oh, yes! I'll write as often as I can; and you must write to me, both of you. It won't do for us three to forget each other," said Lance.

And thus, with much unspoken affection, the three boys parted, to meet again sooner, and under far different circumstances than any they anticipated.

CHAPTER III.

DICK'S UNCLE.

DICK and Harold were very downcast after parting from Lance, but found consolation in each other's society. Dick went back to the grammar school about the 18th or 19th of September; but previous to that time Sir Jasper had allowed Harold to ask him to shoot with him. The old miser was glad that Harold should so often get his dinner elsewhere, and also thought that with two guns the supply of game would be more abundant. Dr. Lovelace gladly acceded to this new sport for his son, took out a licence for him, and gave Dick a handsome gun, with which the boys were equally enraptured.

Dick, under Harold's tuition, became a remarkably good shot, and the boys passed many happy hours amongst the stubble, or in the woods round the Raven's Nest.

When going out for a day's shooting with Harold, Dick always managed to take a sort of knapsack he had bought full of some nice patties, etc., for his friend; but Harold secretly chafed at the fact that he could not ask Dick to even a cup of tea, or bring to their picnics more than a crust of bread and cheese. A high-spirited, generous boy, he felt his imposed poverty cruelly, but found

some consolation in pouring forth all his troubles to his good-natured, sympathetic friend. It was a great relief to him when Sir Jasper once actually opened his heart wide enough to give Dick a pheasant for his mother, and told the boy to "bring young Lovelace home to tea one evening."

And yet how bitterly Harold felt the meanness of that tea compared to the "jolly" meals at Mrs. Lovelace's!

The weak tea, the skim milk (the fresh milk, cream, and butter of the Raven's Nest dairy were always sold), the week-old home-made bread, and the half pheasant (cold from Sir Jasper's dinner), which was all that Mrs. Brown dared set before the two hungry boys.

Nevertheless, Dick looked pleased, and was so amusing and made Sir Jasper laugh so much that he graciously invited him to come again "some time," and bade Harold show him over the house.

Dick was enchanted with the old place; with the endless staircases and passages, the picture gallery, the holes and corners. He declared that there ought to be a ghost; adding, "Anyway, it is a jolly place for playing hide and seek."

Harold took him to the library, but Dick did not care much for books, though he liked amusing stories very well; while Harold devoured every book he could find. He had thus made himself well acquainted with history and poetry, and gained much quaint and yet useful knowledge. His old schoolmaster, a private tutor who lived in Pengarven and gave lessons when he could, had not given him much Latin or Greek, but he had taught him French and Italian and a little German, having himself been a travelling tutor for many years and being more conversant with modern languages than with the classics.

This was all the teaching Sir Jasper would give his nephew, and for it he paid a shamefully low sum.

Thus Harold could read the French and Italian books in the library, and though he would have assuredly failed in an examination, was, perhaps, far beyond the unlucky crammed youngsters in knowledge, and in that mental condition which is most conducive to greater attainments. He loved natural history too, and in this taste Dick shared, being a great collector of insects and also a fair botanist, thanks to the doctor's instructions.

The autumn faded all too soon for the boys, but brought before it ended a great grief to Harold. His poor old tutor—a kind cultivated man, who ought to have made his way in life and did not—died. The poor boy was constantly with him during his last illness, and won Dr. Lovelace's good opinion even more than ever by his kindness to Mr. Fletcher.

When the tutor's will was read it was found that he had left all he possessed to Harold. It was little enough, only three hundred and fifty pounds; but aware that even this little sum would be grasped for investment by Sir Jasper, he left it under the trusteeship of Dr. Lovelace, who was to give small sums from it to Harold if he required them for any reasonable purpose; and who would be free of all responsibilities about them upon receiving Harold's receipt.

Never did heir to millions feel more grateful to its bequeather than Harold was to the poor man who thus left him his all. Sir Jasper was very angry at the will.

"I could have made something of it," he growled; "it would have grown in my hands; now it will be thoroughly wasted."

But Dr. Lovelace would not have allowed waste even

if Harold had wished it. He gave the boy a few pounds for new clothes and needful things, and a small amount for pocket money, out of which Harold resolved at once to buy a gift for Dick at Christmas, and a gown for Mrs. Brown.

And now Harold was able also to hire a pony, and ride with Dick and his father occasionally, Dr. Lovelace thinking that this sum—which would be worth little to Harold by-and-bye, when he inherited his property—might be profitably spent in teaching him the arts fit for his station.

And thus the weeks flitted by, and November gave place to "dark December."

Christmas Eve came at last, and Harold had the satisfaction of bestowing gifts for almost the first time in his life.

"I can't think, Harold," said Dick, as he thanked him for the small but pretty cabinet for his insects, "where you get your generous nature. Not from Sir Jasper, assuredly."

"From my dear father," said Harold gravely, "if I am generous. He was a most generous man, Mrs. Brown tells me. He was half-brother to Uncle Jasper, who was years older than my father; my grandfather married a second time, you know. My father was in the army, and died, as did my dear mother, in India.

Dr. Lovelace had consented to give Dick a party that evening, and Harold had come into Pengarven to attend it, and was to sleep there that night.

It was a very successful entertainment. They danced, played games, had a pretty Christmas-tree with really good presents on it, and then went into the darkened dining-room to have snapdragon.

It was while the boys, with bursts of laughter, were dashing at the burning plums that a very loud rap at the door startled them.

"What a bore!" muttered Dick; "our fun is not over, and there is somebody 'grown-up' come!"

The parents of the children had been invited at ten.

But soon he heard his father's voice in the hall, exclaiming, "My dear Tom! I had no idea you had arrived."

"It is Uncle Tom!" cried little Edith. "Oh, Dick, it is Uncle Tom come from India!"

And it was indeed Dr. Lovelace's only brother who had arrived.

"My dear Tom," said the doctor, "we are delighted to see you; but where are Mary and her girl?"

"I have left them at Dover," he said; "they were tired, having only just landed, but they will be here the day after to-morrow. I could not resist the temptation of running off by myself, in time to keep Christmas with you once more. It was too long a journey for Mary without rest, you see. She has Beatrice with her, whom we have taken now from her Brussels school."

Beatrice was Mr. Lovelace's step-daughter; he had married a widow with one child.

The boys went in to supper, and there they saw the doctor's brother, a tall powerful-looking man of about forty-five.

After supper the boys went home, declaring that they had spent a delightful evening.

Harold did not see Dick again after this entertainment for some days. Then Dick came over to the Raven's Nest, and was welcomed with great glee by his friend. Dick was full of importance; he had a great piece of news to tell.

"What do you think, Harold?" he said. "Uncle Tom has asked my father to let me go back with him to India. I shall be fifteen on New Year's Day, and he says I shall be of great use to him in Assam, and he will teach me himself for a year or two, and provide for me as a son. At first my mother did not like the idea; but father talked her over, because he says it is a good thing for me. You see, when Edward comes back from walking the hospitals and passing his exams., he is to be father's assistant, and by-and-bye his partner; and father thinks it would be better for me to give up studying medicine and take to tea cultivating, especially as Uncle Tom is a very rich man already. So I shall go with him."

"Oh, Dick!" said Harold, "it is really dreadful for me to be left alone so. I am glad for your sake, old fellow, that you are going, but what shall I do without you?"

"I would ask Uncle Tom to take you also," said Dick, "if you were not such a grandee. But the heir of Raven's Nest can't go out to work in India, as I must."

Harold groaned.

"I hate being Uncle Jasper's heir," he said; "but there 's no helping it, unless I ran away. Dick, if I follow you some day to India, will you be glad to see me?"

"Rather!" said Dick; "shouldn't I about, Harold! But don't run away—there 's something sneaking in that."

"I won't if I 'm not driven to it, Dick, but I may be, for Uncle Jasper gets more miserly every day, and if I didn't fish and shoot well, poor Mrs. Brown and I should be starved."

"It 's an awful shame of him," said Dick; "but you need never starve; you can always dine with us if you like."

That afternoon, after Dick had left him, Harold got

out an atlas and a few works on geography, in order to find out to what kind of a place Dick was bound. He found that Assam is a province of British India, consisting of the upper valleys of the Brahmaputra. It is bounded on the north by the sub-Himalayan ranges, and on the east by the unexplored forests and mountains which separate British India from Northern Burmah; on the south by the hills inhabited by the Nagas, Jaintiyas, and Khásiás, which separate Assam from Silket; and on the west by the Garo hills and Kuch Behar. And he read also that the land was beautiful, and full of elephants, tigers, rhinoceroses, and all kinds of wild beasts, and he wished he were going with Dick to hunt the tiger in his native jungle. But what was the use of wishing?

Nevertheless, Harold wished it more and more when he knew the Lovelaces better, and he now often met them when spending a day with Dick. They liked the miser-baronet's poor young nephew, and were very good to him. Mr. Lovelace was a clever man, with much energy and decision of character; Mrs. Lovelace a kind motherly woman; and Beatrice Seaforth (her daughter) a merry, good-natured girl of seventeen. That winter was the happiest Harold had ever spent; but, like all pleasant things, it came to an end at last.

Spring brought its sunshine and showers, and its violets and May blossoms, and the time had come when the Lovelaces must start on the European tour they intended to take before they returned to India. They spoke of visiting Paris, Florence, Rome, Naples, and even Sicily.

And Dick informed Harold that he meant to go up Vesuvius and Etna, and visit all the wonders of the Mediterranean. He promised to write to Harold and tell him of everything he saw worth describing; but

Harold was destined soon to know that Dick's descriptive powers were very limited, and that when he said a place was "very jolly" or "awfully dull," he had come to the end of his description. Of this, however, at that time neither of them was aware.

Mr. Lovelace left for the Continent with his wife and her daughter in May, and Dick as arranged accompanied them. He found it a severe wrench when the moment came for saying good bye to his father and mother and Harold, but he thought it manly not to show what he felt too much, and therefore parted with his family with tolerable composure.

His uncle took him with him to London to fit him out, and Dick wrote from thence to Harold, who had thus a first specimen of Dick's powers of description. This was the note:—

"GRAND HOTEL, MAY 15th.

"DEAR HAROLD,—We got here all right. London is not so fine a place as I thought it was, but it is very large, and I don't think I could find my way well in many parts of it. We went to the Tower yesterday; I liked it very much—it is very jolly. At night we went to the play; it was *Hamlet*, and Irving acted. We went too to Westminster Abbey; there are a good many tombs there. I hope you are quite well. Write to me soon. Yours affectionately, "RICHARD LOVELACE."

This very *jejune* epistle from merry Dick rather disappointed Harold, who had expected a very different kind of letter; but he was glad to hear from his friend anyhow, and besides, the letter contained a capital photograph of Richard, who took very well.

That summer was almost intolerable to Harold. There

was no shooting, no more friends to meet and talk with; nothing but to sit by the stream fishing, and dream all sorts of vague sweet daydreams.

Sir Jasper only saw his nephew at dinner, and that meal was always a purgatorial time for the boy. He was checked in his healthy hunger; scolded for faults real or imaginary; reminded constantly of his dependence, and reproached for his ingratitude. Some people would have said "he led the life of a dog," but in fact few dogs are not happier, and at length the fretted spirit yielded to temptation, and Harold resolved, if possible, to go out into the world and earn his bread.

With these thoughts in his head he asked Dr. Lovelace one day to give him five pounds. The doctor demurred for a moment.

"It is a large sum for a boy," he said; "what do you want with it, Harold?"

Harold truthfully declared that he wanted new books and many other things.

"I will not ask for any more this year if you will let me have this at once," he said.

"And this is August," said the doctor. "The interest of your three hundred pounds — we have spent fifty pounds, you know — is, at five per cent., fifteen pounds. You shall have that yearly, Harold; but you must remember you have to dress on it."

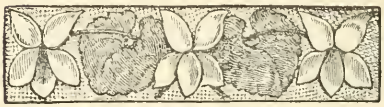
The doctor had invested Harold's three hundred pounds for him.

"I will not ask for more; but may I have five pounds now? Indeed, I will not waste it."

Dr. Lovelace was persuaded, and gave Harold the sum for which he asked. As Harold took it, with eager thanks, the good doctor thought,

"The lad has some kind action in view, I am certain."

Alas! he little guessed the real motive of Harold's insistance.



CHAPTER IV.

RUNNING AWAY.

HAROLD had made up his mind to run away, and, if possible, go to sea. He would be a cabin-boy even, he thought, if they would not take him as a seaman. He must, therefore, escape to a sea-port. Pengarven was only a fishing town and watering-place: Falmouth naturally occurred to him. But if Sir Jasper *did* seek after him, which he rather doubted, he would be sought there first of all; so after many reflections Harold decided that he would have a better chance to be taken on board a merchant ship than a Queen's ship, and that therefore London would be the most desirable place for him to fly to.

He examined his wardrobe (Dr. Lovelace had provided him with a pretty fair one, as to quantity and quality); he collected his few treasures; the small writing-case, which had been Ella Mordaunt's birthday gift; his knife, the parting present of Dick, for which the superstitious Cornish boy had insisted on Harold's paying him a halfpenny; his mother's likeness, which he hung by a cord round his neck; and a small Bible and Prayer Book hat the clergyman had given him at his confirmation. All these he packed up with his clothes in a little old portmanteau which he found in the lumber-room, where,

also, he discovered a heavy oaken stick with a massive silver head and point: this he also appropriated. Then he wrote a letter to Sir Jasper, telling him that he was tired of his idle life at home, and had set out to seek his fortune. He thanked his uncle for the shelter he had given to his helpless boyhood; said he hoped never to do anything which could disgrace the name he bore, and wished him farewell.

These preparations made, he was ready to depart.

He rose on the fateful morning at the first dawn of day, stole down to the larder and found some bread, and took a drink of milk in the dairy; then he was ready to depart. He threw his small portmanteau over his shoulder and prepared to start. In order to make as little noise as possible, he opened a window of the library and got out that way; then passing swiftly across the ill-kept lawn, he was soon concealed from view by the thick trees. He had determined not to go into the town, where he was so well known, and from whence he might be so easily traced, but to walk on to the next railway station along the cliffs—the line ran nearly parallel to the sea for a little while—and then he would cut across country to the station.

The woods on that August morning were in their ripe beauty and perfection. The dew lay like diamond drops on the grass and leaves; the soft coo of the wood-pigeon stole on the air. He walked for nearly a mile through the extensive grounds which were on that side of his uncle's property, and came out at last on the top of the cliffs.

There lay the sea, with the rising sun just painting an edge of rose and gold on the horizon where it met the sky. Harold's heart rejoiced.

"Soon," he thought, "I shall be afloat on those glo-

rious waves. Why do people say that boys can't find work when there is the glorious life of a sailor always open to them?"

Alas! poor Harold had little idea of the life of a merchant seaman. Had he become one, as he wished, he would have found himself sadly unfitted for so rude a life. But Fate, or rather Providence, had something better in store for him. However, with pleasing hopes he went on, singing blithely as he walked. He had achieved nearly three parts of his way to the station now, and leaving the cliffs, he plunged into one of those long West-country lanes which appear to have no ending. It went on in a straight line for a long way, then it wound round nearly at right angles to its former course. It was shaded by trees, which just now were in their richest foliage, and being chiefly limes, gave forth a sweet fresh perfume. Harold had ceased singing; the swinging pace he was now walking at did not permit vocal amusements.

He was advancing silently and swiftly round the curve of the lane, when he perceived a gentleman a few paces off defending himself with a broken umbrella against two footpads. In a moment Harold threw down his portmanteau, seized his stick, and dashed forward to the stranger's aid. Harold was, like most Cornish lads, clever at singlestick. The silver-headed stick was a formidable weapon in his hands, and with it at a blow he laid one of the footpads on the earth.

The other man instantly turned on him with a cudgel, but Harold parried the awkward blow easily, and then rapidly hit the fellow on the wrist, causing him to drop his cudgel. The gentleman then resumed beating him with the broken umbrella, and a second blow from Harold settled the matter. The villain growled an oath, and

sprang through a gap in the hedge, leaving his fallen companion.

Harold lifted both their cudgels from the ground, and said to the stranger,

"If you will hold these sticks, I will tie this rascal's hands and feet; I have some cord in my pocket that I did not use for my portmanteau when I was packing up. One always wants string, you know," he added, like a true boy.

The stranger smiled and took the cudgels.

"A thousand thanks, my brave lad!" he said.

And the boy at once set about his task, tying the still unconscious ruffian's wrists and ankles firmly together.

"He can do no more harm, now," the boy said, as he rose from his knees.

"No; you have secured him well. We can send the police back for him. We had better get on ourselves, lest the other fellow returns; he may have associates in the neighbourhood. I think I owe my life to you, young gentleman, for I was nearly powerlesss, having one arm broken."

Harold then saw that the unknown's left arm hung down useless by his side.

"They have broken your arm!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I had to use both arms in defending myself from the double attack; and the fellow who fled struck me a tremendous blow on my left arm."

"I will just run back for my portmanteau," said Harold, "and then I will help you at once."

And he swiftly flew back for his portmanteau, and then returning, offered the rescued man his arm.

"No, thank you!" he said. "You are sufficiently weighted; and we shall get on faster apart. I can sup-

port my arm on the cudgels. But we must keep our eyes occasionally behind us to see that we are not followed. It was lucky, though, that your Cornish thieves are not garotters. And, now," he added, as they went on, "let me thank you again, my brave lad, for my life. Those rascals had much the better of me, and would no doubt have killed me, had you not come so gallantly to the rescue. Your skill with a stick is remarkable!"

"Oh, all Cornishmen know how to use a stick or cudgel," said Harold.

"So it appears," said the stranger, "I have had proof of it to-day. Well, I thank you sincerely, and I hope I may be able to show you that I am not ungrateful."

Harold answered by a bright smile.

The stranger, a good judge of character, was struck by the open frank face, the brave eyes, and sweet mouth.

"Are you bound," he asked Harold, "like myself, to the station?"

"Yes," said the boy, "I am going to London."

"And I was, but my broken arm will, I fear, delay me," said the stranger.

Then they sank into silence, for Harold saw, from his excessive paleness and the way in which he bit his lip, that the unknown was suffering greatly. He took quite a fancy to this tall stately gentleman, who bore pain so pluckily, and he would not trouble him by talking to him. They were not followed, and by-and-bye they saw the station rising from above the trees.

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE AT AN HOTEL.

THEY had reached at last the little inn which stood just outside the station of Clovernook, and the traveller, who was now beginning to feel faint from the pain of his arm, was glad to enter it and ask for a bed-room. Harold then ran off to find a surgeon, and was not long in perceiving a brass plate on the paling in front of a house in the high street of the little town, bearing the name of Dr. Jones. He rapped at the door, and asked for the doctor. Luckily, he was at home, and at once accompanied the lad back to the Red Lion.

They found the stranger, looking pale and faint, lying on a couch in his own room. The doctor, who had heard from Harold as they walked back the circumstances of the case, after a brief greeting cut open the sleeve of the patient and examined the arm. It was badly broken; but he quickly and deftly set it, and bound it up. Then he ordered Harold to ring for a little brandy and water, which he administered to the injured man.

"You will have to go to bed now," he said, "and I will send Mrs. Gill, the landlady, to attend on you. You will find her a good nurse, and a kind pleasant homely woman."

"Thank you," said the stranger; "but my servant is by this time waiting for me inside the station with my luggage: he was to meet me here. Will you kindly send for him?—Sir Henry Dunmore's man, please. He will do all that I require."

The doctor assented, and took his leave, promising to call again in an hour or two.

"This is a very tiresome accident," said Sir Henry to Harold, when they were again alone; "for I had business of importance to transact in London this afternoon; and I fear your kind attention to me has caused you also to lose your train."

"Oh! I am not tied to time at all," said Harold; "and I am very glad I came up in time to help you."

"You saved my life," said Sir Henry, "by your courage and skill at singlestick. I am under the greatest obligation to you, and, as to confer a favour on a person is generally an encouragement to him to ask another, I mean to request your assistance a second time."

"Anything I can do for you I will," said Harold, who had taken a great fancy to the stately pleasant man whom he had saved.

"Then, first, will you tell me your name?"

Harold flushed.

"Call me Peter Wilkins," he said.

"Or Robinson Crusoe!" laughed his new friend. "That is not your real name, my young friend. But it is not so long ago since I too loved the hero of those marvellous adventures."

Harold looked confused and vexed.

"It is not my real name," he said ingenuously, after an awkward pause; "but I mean to use it till I can retake my own. I am going into the world, Sir Henry, with

five sovereigns for my sole fortune, and as I must probably begin life as a ship-boy, I mean to be called Wilkins till I have retaken my own name under other circumstances."

"Well," said Sir Henry, "I have no right to intrude on your confidence; so, Mr. Peter Wilkins, the favour I have to ask you is, will you go to the —— Bank for me —to the branch, I mean—in the High Street, Kensington; get a package of papers for me that I have left there; and, if your time permits you, bring them back to me here? Of course, I shall pay all your expenses—you can keep your own fortune"—smiling—"intact; and I want to see you again before you ship as a cabin-boy. The papers, I may as well tell you, are of the greatest importance, and I wish to have them in my own hands immediately. Will you do this for me?"

"I shall be very happy," said Harold, "to do it."

Sir Henry's servant at this moment entered, looking agitated and concerned, and full of exclamations of dismay at his employer's misfortune. He was a highly respectable-looking valet, but Harold, glancing at his face, thought he had a sly, furtive look. Sir Henry ordered him to bring him pen, ink, and paper, and at the same time to order breakfast for the young gentleman, "who was his guest," and Harold was very glad to accept the hospitality thus tendered him, and enjoyed immensely the capital meal which the valet had ordered to be served up for him.

He had just concluded a rather remarkably good breakfast, when Saunders appeared with Sir Henry's compliments, and would Mr. Wilkins go up to him when he had finished. Harold ran off at once.

Sir Henry had a letter in his hand.

"This," said he, "is my order to the manager of the bank to give the package up to you. Be sure you take care of it, Peter, for the fortunes of an orphan boy depend on it, and there is a person who would be too glad to abstract it from safe keeping."

Harold took the letter, put it in his pocket, and promised to be very careful.

"You will arrive now in town after the banks are shut," went on Sir Henry, "so you must go to an hotel—the Charing Cross I think would be best for you. Dine and sleep there. Of course you will take a cab from Waterloo Station to it, and from it to the bank. Be sure to take cabs everywhere, in short, or you may get lost, which I charge you not to do; and here is a ten-pound note, my dear lad, for your expenses."

"Won't that be too much?" asked Harold.

"No. Your first-class journeyings there and back, your hotel, and cabs will exhaust it, I fancy. When does the next train go?"

"At one-thirty," replied Harold.

"Then you have no time to spare. Good bye."

And they shook hands.

Harold found the landlady in the bar downstairs speaking to the barmaid. He asked her if he might leave his portmanteau with her; and borrowed of her a black travelling-bag, in which he deposited his brushes and night-linen. Then he crossed the road to the station.

This journey was actually the first the poor lad had taken, and he enjoyed it immensely. He never wearied of looking out of the window at the lovely country the train passed through, and with his usual poetical enthusiasm murmured to himself,—

"Where's the coward that would not dare
To die for such a land?"

The entrance into London was rather bewildering to the country boy; but he soon secured a cab, and was speedily deposited at the Charing Cross Hotel. Here he ordered dinner at once in the coffee-room, and told the waiter he should want a bed.

Seated at one of the small tables, he amused himself, while waiting for his dinner to be brought, by looking about him at the novel scene. At length a gentleman seated at the next small table, and facing him, attracted his especial attention by his disagreeable likeness to Sir Henry Dunmore. He had much the same air and features, but a heavy frown rested on his brow, and his eyes were fierce, and even cruel—though, like Sir Henry's, they were blue and his hair fair. The gentleman seemed uneasy; he watched the door as if expecting some one to enter, and once left his place and the room, returning in a few moments, looking vexed and irritated.

Dinner over and paid for, and the waiter rather liberally "tipped," our young hero thought he would like a turn in the lighted-up Strand before he went to bed, and asked the waiter if he could be shown to his room, that he might leave his travelling-bag there. The man at once complying with his request, transferred him to another attendant outside the room, and Harold was shown upstairs to a handsome bed-room on an upper floor. Here he deposited his bag, and then ran downstairs, eager to get a glimpse of long-dreamed-of London. You may imagine the wonder and amusement of a lad who had lived such a recluse life in Cornwall at finding himself in that magnificent street, with lights wherever a theatre stood, and noisy with the roll of omnibuses and

cabs! He longed to go into one of the theatres, but resisted the temptation (though he knew well that there he could not lose his way), because he did not wish to diminish his small property, even by a shilling; and Sir Henry's money was, of course, only a trust. After a time he returned to the hotel, and asked the porter where the Embankment was, as he had a great desire to see it. He was directed down Villiers Street, and assured that he could not lose his way; but that he had better not linger long by the river, as it was late for the Embankment.

"And you'd best not go farther than Cleopatra's Needle, sir," said the man, patronizingly, "for there are very rough customers on the Hembankment by this time."

"Oh, I shall take my stick," said Harold, with a laugh. And he ran off on his intended walk.

The Embankment was soon reached, and the lad stood by the wall looking over at the rolling river and its reflected rows of lights, which, he thought, it was worth coming from Cornwall to see. There seemed very few people here, and Harold liked the quiet, and, leaning against the wall, stood listening to the lapping of the water against the stone.

By-and-bye two people in earnest conversation approached the spot where he stood. As they passed him he heard these words spoken in French in a low but very distinct voice,—

"I have succeeded. It was a risk, for Dunmore——"

Then the strangers passed on, but Harold, at hearing his new friend's name, turned and looked after the speaker. He felt convinced that he was the very man who had sat opposite to him at dinner, and he felt a vague uneasiness.

Sir Henry had told him to be careful, for some one wanted the papers. Did this man mean that he had been successful in getting them? However, he (Harold) could do nothing, and after a short pause he returned to the hotel, and meeting his friend the waiter, asked him if he knew the name of the gentleman who had dined at the next table to himself.

"That, sir," was the reply, "that was Sir Henry Dunmore. His bed-room adjoins yours; I took his bag up for him just now."

"Sir Henry Dunmore!" exclaimed Harold. "Why, he is now in Cornwall."

"No, sir, I think not. This gent calls himself Sir Henry Dunmore."

Some one called the waiter at this moment, and he hurried away.

Harold was greatly perplexed. Could there be *two* Sir Henry Dunmores? It was unlikely. He began to fear some swindling was going on, but felt too sleepy after his long day of excitement to think much about it, and mounted to his bed-room, resolving to go to bed and see what could be done in the morning.

On entering his room he lifted the black bag he had borrowed from the floor, and opened it to take out his brushes and night-gear. To his amazement they were not to be found there; the bag contained only a comb, a razor, and a package of papers. As he lifted the latter out in perplexity, to see if anything was underneath, a cover fell off it, and he saw written in large clear letters,

"Package of papers belonging to Sir Henry Dunmore, left at —— Bank. July 20."

He could scarcely believe his eyes. Then suddenly he went out and looked at the number of the door. It was

50—his own was 51! The sharp boy saw at once that he had blundered on a "find" of great importance. This was the sham Sir Henry's room: he had somehow got out of the bank the very package for which Harold had come to London! There was not a minute to lose: he must carry them away at once, before the robber came back; but not to his own room. The man might, nay, was sure to miss his packet, and would demand a search: the papers would be taken from Harold, if found in his possession; he might even be accused of robbery himself, and in any way would lose the package. He thought and acted with lightning speed. He shut the bag, put the packet in his bosom, and ran downstairs at full speed.

"Supper or tea, sir?" asked the waiter, meeting him at their foot.

"Get me some tea," said Harold. "Same table: I am just going out."

And he flew out into the Strand. There, by a happy chance, he saw a Kensington omnibus standing by the pavement: he jumped in at once.

"Put me down in Kensington High Street," he said. And the ponderous vehicle moved off.

He sat in a perfect ferment of thought, revolving what he should do. He would get a bed at some inn, and go to the bank early in the morning and find out if the papers really had been stolen or not. If not, he must send back those he possessed, at once to the Charing Cross Hotel. If these were the right ones required by Sir Henry, he would tell no one that he had them, but return at once to his friend, and send up to the hotel the sum owing for his bed and untasted tea, and claim his own bag.

The omnibus put him out at last, and weary and dazed,

the poor boy, carefully holding his precious bag, found a small inn, where he engaged a bed-room. It was not like the hotel, but his bed was clean and fresh, and, with the package under his pillow, he soon fell into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

HAROLD PAYS OFF THE MANAGER.

HAROLD did not wake till late the next morning, and when he had had breakfast he saw that it was close on the hour of the bank's opening. He therefore proceeded thither at once. He delivered Sir Henry's letter to a clerk, who took it to the manager, and in a few minutes returned, looking troubled.

"Will you walk this way?" he said, and led Harold to the manager's office. He (the manager) was seated, and holding Sir Henry's letter in his hand.

"From whom did you receive this letter?" he asked Harold.

"From Sir Henry Dunmore," was the reply.

"But Sir Henry sent for the papers yesterday," said the manager, "and they were given up to him."

Harold at once saw that he had done right, and had been very lucky.

"Sir Henry Dunmore," he said, "was on his way to London yesterday, when he was, while walking to the station, attacked by footpads, and had his arm broken. He is lying at the Railway Inn, Clovernook, now, and has sent me on for the papers."

"A very roundabout story," said the manager, sarcas-

tically; "Sir Henry Dunmore is staying, or, rather, was staying, at Charing Cross Hotel. He was not to leave it, I believe, till last night, so how could he be in Cornwall? Sit down, young man," to Harold, who flushed with passion, "sit down; and you, Mr. White," to the clerk, "send Mr. Jones to me."

Harold burst forth indignantly, "Do you take me for an impostor?"

"I don't know what you are yet," said the manager, rudely, "we shall soon see."

In a few moments Mr. Jones, a grave, sensible-looking man, made his appearance.

The manager opened a drawer in his writing-table, took out a note, and gave it, with the one Harold had brought, to Mr. Jones.

"You are an expert, or nearly so," he said, "at handwritings. Which of those notes is a forgery?"

The clerk put on his spectacles and examined them carefully.

"You know Sir Henry's hand?" queried the manager.

"Yes, sir, very well. This is his writing," giving the note Harold had brought to the manager; "the other is a wonderfully good forgery."

The manager looked greatly annoyed.

"You know Sir Henry personally, do you not?" he asked of Mr. Jones.

"Yes, sir; when he is in Kensington he is often here."

"Send off a messenger—no, go yourself to Charing Cross Hotel and ask if Sir Henry Dunmore is there still, and see him. You will wait here," he added to Harold, "till this gentleman returns."

"You have no right to detain me," said the boy indignantly.

"I have the right to give you to the police on suspicion of fraud," replied the manager spitefully.

"Your own clerk tells you that the letter I have brought is genuine," said Harold, "and the other a forgery."

"He thinks so; I mean to make sure," was the reply. "Remain where you are, or I shall send for the police."

And the manager resumed his previous employment. Harold felt that it would be wiser to wait where he was. If he attempted to get off he would be easily caught and brought back, and the name of the police terrified the country boy; but he sat in a state of great uneasiness.

If the robber had missed the papers he (Harold) would be sure to be suspected of taking them; both from his flight and from his room being close to the sham Sir Henry's; and they would be taken from him. The moments seemed hours to the poor lad. He asked once if he might telegraph to Sir Henry, or if the manager would, but received a flat refusal to both requests. The fact was, the manager expected to get into trouble, and was consequently in the worst of tempers.

At last Mr. Jones returned.

"Sir Henry Dunmore," he said, "had left the hotel the previous evening by the last train to Dover."

The manager looked still more worried.

"I think, Mr. Jones," he said, "it would be best for you to accompany this young gentleman," with a sneer at the word, "to Clovernook, and see if you or I am right about the letters. At any rate, it is the thing to do. We must discover and punish the perpetrator of the forgery, whichever it may be."

Mr. Jones agreed that it would be the best course to adopt.

"And if you will excuse me, sir," he said, "I think it would be as well to set a detective on the track of the Sir Henry who left Charing Cross with a friend—a Frenchman—last night. He *may* be the guilty party."

"I will send for one at once," said his superior. "Go and dine with this young lad at the railway station, and then take the earliest train to Cornwall. Here is a cheque for your expenses, which the bank pays."

Harold rose with a thankful heart to accompany Mr. Jones to the station and to luncheon, for it was now one o'clock.

You will wonder, perhaps, why Harold, having the package in his own possession, should allow the manager to take so much trouble about it; why he did not at once tell the story of his recovery of the papers. Well, it was partly that he did not want to give up the papers to any one but Sir Henry, and partly because he had a boy's love of fun and mischief, and he thought it only a fair return for the rudeness with which he had been treated, to give the bank the expense and trouble of their clerk's railway journey into Cornwall. So without a word about his precious packet, he drove with Mr. Jones to Waterloo Station, and was soon on his return journey to Clovernook.

The clerk learned in handwritings was quite convinced that Harold was the real messenger, and therefore behaved with great kindness to the lad.

"I had a holiday yesterday," he said; "if I had been at the bank, the bearer of that letter would never have succeeded in getting Sir Henry's papers. It is a serious thing having lost them, as they were, I believe, highly important."

They did not arrive at Clovernook till about nine

o'clock, but Sir Henry had not gone to bed. He had been lying on a sofa in a sitting-room next his bed-room all day, and was rather surprised that Harold had not arrived earlier.

Harold thought Sir Henry looked pale and ill when they were shown into his room by Saunders. He (Sir Henry) was very much surprised when he saw the bank clerk, whom he knew at once, with Harold, and he listened to his explanation of why he came there, and examined the note which he showed him, with an expression on his countenance of absolute dismay.

"It is a fatal loss, I fear," he said, "Mr. Jones. The welfare of a young ward of mine is most seriously compromised by it."

"We are extremely sorry," began poor Mr. Jones, "it is a great misfortune for the bank also; but we have sent a detective after the sham Sir Henry, and we will spare no efforts to recover the papers."

Sir Henry flushed so painfully and looked so distressed now that Harold would no longer suffer him to feel anxiety. He drew the packet from his bosom, and said,

"Are these the lost papers, Sir Henry?"

The baronet took them, glanced at them, and uttered a suppressed exclamation of thankfulness.

"They are all right!" he exclaimed, examining them; "but, my dear boy, where did you get them?"

Harold related his adventures since they parted, clearly and simply; how he had overheard those few words on the Embankment, and afterwards found and secured the papers from the sham Sir Henry's bag.

"You are as ready and shrewd as you are brave and lucky," said Sir Henry, "for it was great luck—and yet, no! surely I ought to say Providence—which guided you into

the wrong room. Two bags exactly like and a mistaken door have done a great good. I have no doubt the robber had left his bag in his room while having an interview with his accomplice, and you mistook his room for your own—so far it was luck, or Providence; but your decision and rapidity of action saved the papers. You have again greatly obliged me."

"But," said Mr. Jones sharply, "I should like to know why this young gentleman, having the papers in his possession, did not at once make the matter clear by showing them, and thus save the bank the expense and me the trouble of a long journey?"

"Yes, Wilkins, why have you kept it secret till this minute?" asked Sir Henry, laughing. "Was it for the sake of a *coup de théâtre?*"

"No, indeed," said Harold, colouring. "I was afraid if I said I had them the manager would have declared I was a thief, and have given me to the police. He was so insolent that it serves him right to have been made anxious. And, Sir Henry, I wanted Mr. Jones to tell *his* story first, for *he* is very clever and very kind."

"Well," said Sir Henry, "that is a just excuse, and I hope that Mr. Jones and his bank will forgive your trick in return for our saying nothing about the fault of the bank in giving up my papers on a forgery. The bank may charge expenses to me."

Mr. Jones smiled assent, and then Sir Henry begged that he and "Mr. Wilkins" would go and have as good a dinner as the inn could produce. Over their roast chicken Mr. Jones grew quite friendly with his boy companion.

"You are some relation, I suppose, of Sir Henry's?" he said to Harold.

"No; I am only an acquaintance. I met him yesterday morning for the first time." And then Harold told the story of the footpads with great glee.

"It would have been capital fun," he said, "if Sir Henry had not been hurt."

"H'm! I don't see much fun in breaking heads," said Mr. Jones; "but, do you know, I think you must be a lucky boy, things have turned out so well for you; and Sir Henry will be your friend for life. He is a very kind, good man, though a very eccentric one. Everybody says he does things like no one else."

"I think he's a capital fellow," said Harold—"the sort of man one would like to sail under. But he is not in the navy, I suppose?"

"Well, no, he is not; but he is devoted to the sea, and has a fine steam yacht of great size, I hear, in which he almost lives."

"He isn't married, then?" asked Harold.

"No, he isn't married; but he has a little boy on board the yacht, with his nurse—a child whom he has adopted, I hear; and I suspect those papers belong to it, but I don't know."

"Has he a brother?" asked Harold, thinking of the strange likeness between the sham and real Sir Henrys. With great consideration, he had not mentioned this likeness before the clerk.

"No; he has no brother, but he has a first cousin, who is his heir. A rather bad lot he is, too, I believe, but the estates belonging to the baronetcy are entailed, and unless Sir Henry marries, he must come in for them."

"Is he like Sir Henry in face?" asked the boy.

"I don't know; I never saw Mr. Giles Dunmore. The baronet has only had the title a year or so. He inherited

it from his cousin, the late baronet, who was also very eccentric, and who scarcely ever lived in England."

The waiter appearing at this moment, Harold asked him if the police had taken the footpad he had struck down and bound.

"No, sir," said the man; "when they reached the spot that Sir Henry described, the man was gone, but there were marks of footsteps and of a struggle. His comrades had probably returned and carried him off. The police are scouring the country to find the robbers."

Sir Henry sent a message just as they were ending their dinner to say that he would like to see Mr. Wilkins for a few minutes before he went to bed, and Harold speedily obeyed the summons. Sir Henry, who had retired for the night, received him with a kind smile.

"My dear boy," he said, "I sent for you that I might beg you not to go away to-morrow morning till I have spoken with you."

"I should not have gone away till I had seen you, Sir Henry," said Harold, "for I have your change to give you—here it is; but I have not paid for the bed I engaged, but did not occupy, at the hotel, nor for the tea which I ordered."

And he put the change of the ten pounds into Sir Henry's hand.

"You have been very economical," said Sir Henry, smiling; "I expected no change. You had better keep it," offering it to him again, "to pay for your bag if you don't get it again."

"Oh, no, thank you!" said Harold, flushing. "I couldn't take payment. But the tea and the bed will have to be paid for (no doubt you know, Sir Henry, what they would be), and when you send it, you could,

if you please, ask them to forward Mrs. Gill's bag here. My bed-room number was fifty-one."

Sir Henry looked at him earnestly.

"You are a good lad!" he said. "Well, I will send up the money for the bed and tea, and desire that your bag—if it has not been taken by mistake also—may be returned. You will stay with me till it arrives?"

"Yes, if you like, Sir Henry," frankly.

"I do like very much to have you. Now go and get some tea, and to bed with you; you must be tired out."

And Harold's sleep that night was certainly of the deepest.

The clerk left early the next day, but Sir Henry saw him first, and induced him to undertake the payment of the bed and tea, and the sending back Harold's bag—which, however, never arrived. It had disappeared; no doubt the sham Sir Henry had taken it in mistake for his own, having also mistaken his room, which might account for his hurried departure.

Harold amused himself by fancying what the robber's feelings would be when he opened the wrong bag and found that he had made so fatal an exchange.

During those two days of waiting Sir Henry saw a good deal of Harold. He had been convinced from the first that "Peter Wilkins" was a young gentleman, and, he feared, a runaway, and in some anxiety he had looked carefully and daily at the *Times* for an advertisement for "a tall, dark, gentlemanly lad," but hitherto in vain. If Wilkins had fled from home, his friends had evidently no wish for his return. It was when he had ceased to look for it that, at last, Dr. Lovelace's advertisement appeared, entreating Harold Sinclair to write to his anxious friends. The appeal was signed "Dick."

Neither did Harold see it, or he would have replied to it at once; he meant to write by-and-bye, but not yet.

Meantime he had grown on affectionate terms with Sir Henry, and the baronet still kept his young friend with him. Harold often read to him, occasionally wrote his letters, and had no hesitation in remaining his guest while Sir Henry so greatly needed his attentions.

CHAPTER VII.

A ROMANTIC STORY.

ONE day, when Harold was sitting near his couch, Sir Henry asked,

"What was the usurper of my name like, Peter?"

"Sir Henry, he was a disagreeable likeness of yourself."

"I thought so," murmured the baronet; "but why did you not tell me so before, Peter?"

"I thought from the likeness that there might be a relationship, and that you would not like Mr. Jones to know it," said Harold; "since then I have forgotten it."

"Again I am obliged," said Sir Henry; "I should not have wished Jones's suspicions to be directed aright. You have shown delicacy and tact, Peter, and since you are so trustworthy and cautious, I mean to tell you the story of the papers you saved for me. But first, will you consent to take a voyage or two with me in my yacht as midshipman? You would thus see much both of sea and land, and discover whether you really like the life of a seaman when you have experienced it."

"I shall be very glad to go with you, Sir Henry," declared Harold; "you are only too good to me."

"Then it is settled. You are midshipman of my yacht,

henceforward, and I hope part-guardian of a dear little boy who is on board her at this moment. Now listen to my story. I succeeded to my cousin's baronetcy, estates, and large personal fortune about two years ago. Shortly afterwards I received a letter from Italy, from a lady who declared that she was the widow of the late baronet, my cousin, imploring me to go to her at Naples. Of course I obeyed the summons, and found in the hotel to which she had directed me, one of the most lovely women I have ever seen; but in the last stage of consumption. She told me that she was the orphan daughter of an Italian professor; she had become governess in the family of a rich American, and had accompanied them back to their own land. There she met my Cousin Algernon, who was travelling in the States; he fell deeply in love with her, but as his father was then living, and would never have consented to his marriage with a poor foreigner, he persuaded her to be secretly married to him in New York. She spoke very little English, and did not know the name of the street or church where she had been married. She left her situation soon after, and went with Algernon to England. A little son was born to them in London, and being a sickly baby, was baptized at home soon after his birth.

"Algernon was in the Foreign Office. He soon afterwards got a diplomatic appointment in Italy, and Carina was happy in being thus restored to the sunshine of her own land; but she was even then in a consumption.

"About a year after their return to Italy Algernon was summoned to attend his father's death-bed. He left Carina, providing her with a pleasant home and a good income, at Naples, and hastened to England. His father died, and he was now himself a wealthy baronet. But

he did not instantly send for his wife and child, nor did he even announce his marriage. Indeed, all through this affair Algernon behaved with blamable selfishness. He had persuaded Carina to act wrongly and deceitfully, as well as doing so himself; and even now his thoughtlessness exposed her to great trials. Three months after his father's death no one knew he was married: he remained at the Hall, and even joined the hunting-field, but said nothing of his wife and son.

"If (as I trust) he meant to do her tardy justice, he delayed it till it was too late: he was thrown from his horse while hunting, and killed on the spot.

"I succeeded him in due course. Carina, miserable at not hearing from him, learned the truth by applying to the English consul. She was at first overwhelmed with grief, but roused herself at last for the sake of her boy, and wrote to me. I asked her, of course, for the certificates of her marriage and of her boy's baptism, without which I could not act for her. She had neither; she said Algernon had always kept them; but I had found nothing of the kind amongst his papers. Still, I never doubted her: I felt that the dying Carina was a truthful woman.

"I wrote to my lawyer, and desired that every inquiry should be made for the certificates, and every place searched for them at the Hall; but they could not be found. My cousin and next heir, Giles Dunmore, was very angry with me for making these inquiries: he declared that Carina was an impostor, and that she was trying to impose her child on me as my cousin's heir. However, I persisted in advertising for the certificates, or even for any information on the subject. But none had reached us when poor Carina died. I soothed her last

moments by promising to adopt little Algy (whose sweet face and pretty ways had won my love at once), and to take care of him, even if we never recovered the papers which would attest his birthright.

"But a very short time ago I received a letter from a man who had been confidential valet to Algernon about the time of the marriage. He said he had the certificates, and should be happy to give them up to me for the reward offered—two hundred pounds. He declared that his late master had given him the papers to keep for him, with others; and that when he was dismissed some little time afterwards, he had taken them with him by mistake. This was quite unlikely; he had probably stolen the papers, and kept them for the purpose of ultimately being paid by some one to restore them. However, that was, at present, no concern of mine, nor could I have proved the truth of my suspicions; consequently I told him that if he would come to my house in Kensington, I would pay him the money, if the papers were all right.

"He brought them to me. I paid him a hundred pounds, and told him that he should have the remainder of the reward when I had ascertained from America that the certificate of marriage was genuine. He was willing to consent to this. Meantime I placed the packet of papers in charge of the —— Bank, where I banked, not having time at the moment to send or take them to my family solicitor, being summoned to the supposed death-bed of a dear old friend in Cornwall. But I wrote and told Giles all about it, and very imprudently said, 'The proofs are now at —— Bank, and I doubt not will prove correct, though I have only had a glance at them.' I was returning to London the day you saved my life—

first, because my friend was out of danger, and next, because I had had an angry letter from Giles, in which he denounced my folly, and advised me to destroy the sham certificates at once, using expressions which alarmed me, and made me anxious to put the certificates at once into my lawyer's hands, and have the matter settled.

"I fear very much, Wilkins, that it was Giles who personated me and got the certificates from the bank. You have saved me a great deal of trouble, and perhaps shame, by your speedy action. Now, I tell you this story because I wish you to share my care of Algy. He is very delicate, and I am going to take him to the Mediterranean as soon as possible with his nurse, a faithful Italian woman. When we return to England we will see whether you can go to sea in the mercantile marine; I fear the navy is not possible. What do you say to my offer?"

Harold accepted it most thankfully. "You are only too good to me, Sir Henry," he said.

But Sir Henry soon laid aside that title. He went very shortly afterwards to London with Harold, and remained there till his little charge's rights were established, and the title and estates transferred to him. Meantime Mr. Dunmore, as we must now call him, took Harold to see all the wonders of London, and treated him as if he had been his son, and Harold learned every day to love and reverence his friend better and better. Just before they left town Harold wrote to Dr. Lovelace and told him of his good fortune, and that he was going to sea in Mr. Dunmore's yacht. "And I really hope," he added in conclusion, "that Dick and I may meet again soon, for we are going to the Mediterranean because

Algy needs a warm climate. Lance's ship is there also, therefore I trust 'we three' may meet again shortly."

(He little thought how and where that triple meeting would take place!)

"You can tell Uncle Jasper of my good fortune," went on the boy's letter, "that is, if he cares to hear; and do not forget to tell kind Mrs. Mordaunt and little Ella of it, and that I am always their, as well as your, affectionate Harold."

"I wish Dick could write such a letter as this," said Dr. Lovelace, as he finished reading the lengthy epistle aloud; "but he never will."

"No matter," said his wife; "the days for good letter writers are gone. Dick will write well enough for an age of telegrams and postcards."

Dr. Lovelace shook his head.

"You are wrong, dear Nelly," he said, "and some day you may find out what a valuable accomplishment good letter writing is when great distances divide friends."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

MR. LOVELACE had resolved after his brief visit to England to travel for a short time on the Continent before he returned to Assam, so Dick was to have the great advantage of seeing something of Europe before he commenced life as a clerk in his uncle's office. He was very happy; he liked his Aunt Jane, who enjoyed the fun of a merry boy, and he and Beatrice got on pretty well, though sometimes she resented his chaffing her for fine-lady airs and graces. She had not been in India since her early childhood, having been sent home for education to her mother's cousin, who kept a *pension* for young ladies in Brussels, from whence her father and mother had taken her on their return to England. She was rather pretty, very fair, with lovely hair and large blue eyes, but she was by no means clever, though very good-natured and affectionate.

They visited Paris, Milan, Florence, Rome, and Naples; and Dick, who was a fair classical scholar for his years, and knew his Roman History, was greatly amazed at his cousin's blunders in the Eternal City.

"I have heard of the Coliseum," she said to him one day; "Mrs. Waller told us once that she had been there as a girl, and it was wonderful. She quite knew Paris

from seeing a panorama of it there, and they had the Colossus of Rhodes there, and ships in full sail passed between its feet."

Dick was mystified.

"A panorama in the Coliseum?" he said.

Mr. Lovelace burst out laughing.

"My little girl, you are speaking of quite another Coliseum than that of Rome," he said. "Your cousin ought to have told you that it was a place in the Regent's Park, London—misnamed after the Coliseum you will see to-day. Dick," he added to his nephew; "I fear Bee does not know much—you must try and teach your cousin a little."

And Dick, grateful for his uncle's kindness, brought Beatrice his last prize, Arnold's "Rome," and told her it would amuse her if she read it. "At least," he added, "the first volume."

"'Arnold's Rome,'—who wrote it?" asked Beatrice.

"Oh, Bee! how can you ask? Why, Arnold, of course. Don't you see it 's 'Arnold's Rome' on the binding even? He was a capital fellow—a Rugby schoolmaster."

"Oh," said Beatrice, "I will read it, Dick, if you wish, but I hate history and dates. I like novels best."

Dick made no reply; he thought Beatrice a goose. But, after all, it might be the fault of those who had taught her. She spoke French very well, and had a smattering of Italian and German, and she sang prettily, so Mrs. Lovelace was quite satisfied with her attainments. And Dick did his best to rectify her blunders about Rome, which were many and, to him, comical. She had really no idea of chronology; and mixed up Julius Cæsar, with whom she had some acquaintance (as being mentioned in her History of England), with Trajan and Titus. Harold, well read and with great poetical feeling, would

have been annoyed if not irritated at her ignorance, and would have missed sympathy with his own feelings; but careless Richard Lovelace, though he liked well enough to see Rome, felt no especial interest in it, and was in fact glad to start for Naples, where, as they heard, Vesuvius was offering the spectacle of a small eruption.

From beautiful Naples they passed over to Sicily, as Mr. Lovelace said they ought to see the other and larger volcano, and accordingly they steamed into the splendid harbour of Messina on a lovely September morning about six weeks after Harold had left his uncle's house. They landed at once, and went to one of the best hotels, in the Sicilian city.

"The signore is not our only guest," said the English-speaking waiter to Mr. Lovelace, as he conducted them to a suite of apartments; "there is an English signore in the rooms above these. He has his yacht in the harbour; but his *bambino* was ill, and he has brought it on shore by the doctor's advice."

The Lovelaces had on landing been struck with great admiration for the fine Sicilian city, surrounded by its vast fortifications; with its noble citadel and arsenal, and containing, as they knew it did, many interesting monuments of antiquity.

"We have much to see in this city," said Mr. Lovelace, as they sat at dinner. "I think the harbour and Pharos are very fine."

"And so do I," said Mrs. Lovelace. "Beatrice and I shall expect Dick to furnish us with all the interesting details he knows about it."

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know much about it," he said: "you must look it up in your guide-book, aunty."

"Shall we drive on the Corso this evening, papa?" asked Beatrice.

"If you like," was the reply. And Mr. Lovelace ordered a carriage.

The evening was delightful; the cool sea-breezes came in to relieve the heat of the day, and the fashionable promenade called the Corso had numberless carriages of all kinds driving up and down it, or standing still while their occupants chatted with their friends. Suddenly Dick, who sat beside Beatrice, with his back to the horses, cried out,

"Why, there's Harold Sinclair! How came he here? Oh, uncle! please stop the carriage and let me get out: I must speak to him!"

Mr. Lovelace at once called to the coachman, and Dick, springing out, pursued Harold through the crowd of pedestrians. He was quite breathless when he came up with him, gasping, "Harold! Harold!"

Harold turned at his name, and with a glad exclamation of "Dick!" the boys clasped hands.

"Who would have thought of seeing you here, Sinclair?" said Richard; "I thought you were tied for life to the Raven's Nest."

"No, I have taken flight, literally as well as figuratively," laughed Harold; "but it is a long story. I am here with a great friend, a Mr. Dunmore; I am midshipman of his yacht."

"Well, that is a lark," cried Richard. "When did you enter the navy?"

"I have not entered it," said Harold. "Mr. Dunmore has a private yacht, with a master in the navy for his captain; so he said he wanted a second officer, and proposed that I should go with him as such, and that Captain Elliot should teach me my duty."

"It's the strangest thing!" said Richard; "and did Sir Jasper let you go willingly?"

"No, indeed he didn't. The truth is, Dick, I ran away, and happening to help Mr. Dunmore in a scrimmage with two footpads, he has taken charge of me ever since; so if Uncle Jasper has learned from your father that I am safe, it is as much as he knows. But I wrote you the whole story. Didn't you get my letter?"

"No," said Richard; "but that is not strange: we have been constantly moving from place to place, but my uncle has written to the Poste Restante at Rome to have them forwarded. I think my father would have written last there. You sent your letter through him, I suppose?"

"Yes. I wrote to him and enclosed a letter to you just before we sailed. By the way, Dick, Mr. Dunmore does not know my true name. I am called Peter Wilkins."

Richard burst into a fit of laughter.

"Wasn't that the fellow," he asked, "who sold his soul to the demon? He was Peter Somebody."

At this moment Mr. Dunmore's courier, who was with them on the box, approached, and, touching his hat, said that "Monsieur Lovelace hoped his nephew would bring Monsieur Harold to speak to them."

"Oh, yes! of course," said Dick; "tell my uncle we are coming. I say, Harold, am I to introduce Peter Wilkins?"

"Shut up," said Harold. And the boys followed the courier to the carriage, which had moved slowly after Richard.

Mr. and Mrs. Lovelace were very glad to see Harold, whom they had met at the doctor's, and whom they all liked and pitied; and Beatrice was equally glad to see

him: she thought him more courteous and refined in manner than her Cousin Richard.

"How long have you been in Messina?" asked Mr. Lovelace, when Harold had briefly explained how he came there—not, however, mentioning his flight from home.

"About five days," replied Harold. "Mr. Dunmore has a little boy-ward, a child nearly four years old, who is with us; he wasn't very well—he's a delicate little chap; so Mr. Dunmore had a doctor to see him at Malta, and he advised him to go to Sicily, and let him run about in the fields."

"But there are no fields in Messina," said Beatrice, smiling.

"No; but just a short drive from the city there are splendid pastures, used for dairy purposes; and there are lovely gardens of flowers, and mulberry plantations for the silkworms."

"Oh! are there?" said Richard. "Then I shall do myself the honour of inspecting them."

"Where is Mr. Dunmore staying?" asked Mrs. Lovelace.

"At the Royal Hotel," replied Harold.

"Oh, that is where we are!" cried Beatrice; "how glad Dick will be to have you with him again, Mr. Sinclair!"

They chatted a little longer, then Harold said he must be going back; he had been with a message for Captain Elliot to the quay, but thought he would take a turn or two on the Corso before he went home.

"And it was lucky I did," he said, with a glance at Dick. Then, wishing them "Good evening," he ran off.

"That is a fine lad," said Mr. Lovelace; "I am glad he has escaped from that old miser's den."

"And so am I," said Mrs. Lovelace; "we all of us liked Harold Sinclair."

The three young people met before breakfast the next day in the garden of the hotel, and there in greater detail Harold related all his recent adventures to his friends—only concealing the belief of Mr. Dunmore, that the person who had stolen the papers was his cousin.

They listened with great interest. Beatrice's pretty face flushed, and her eyes sparkled at such a romantic tale, and she looked on Harold as a perfect hero.

"It is such fun, too," she said, "that you should be Peter Wilkins. It is quite like a three-volume novel."

"But will Mr. and Mrs. Lovelace keep the secret?" asked Harold a little anxiously.

"Oh, I will beg them to do so," cried Beatrice.

"But they won't, Harold," said Dick. "I know Uncle Lovelace will say you ought to tell Mr. Dunmore."

"Well, I suppose I must," said Harold, with a sigh.

"No—let papa tell him, then," said Beatrice; "he can explain better than you can *why* you were obliged to run away."

And Harold eagerly allowed that this would be much the better plan.

"And now where have you been, Dick," he asked, "since we parted?"

"In Paris, Florence, and Naples," said Dick, "and several other Italian places. Then, after seeing Vesuvius, Uncle Lovelace thought he should like to see Etna. We came to Reggio, and then crossed over—and I *do* hope we shall go up the big mountain."

"Oh, dear, I hope not!" said Beatrice. "Mr. Sinclair,

we were all nearly killed on Vesuvius. We went to see the eruption, and were standing on the extinct point which once upon a time buried two great cities, and papa suddenly insisted on our going away from it. Mamma and I were quite vexed, for we could see the eruption very well, and there were so many people, too, to see. But papa made us go, and we had just reached Professor Palmieri's observatory, when we looked back, and at that moment saw the peak open and throw up a great river of lava. We screamed! But if we had been there we should have been scalded to death, as many were."

"That was indeed a narrow escape," said Harold.

Thus they went on chatting till a lovely fair-haired little boy of nearly four years old came running out to call "Halald" to breakfast. Harold caught the pretty child in his arms, and asked Beatrice if he wasn't a jolly little fellow; and she kissed the pet, who peeped shyly up at her from Harold's shoulder.

Then Harold carried little Algy with him up to Mr. Dunmore's apartments, and set him down to play on the carpet while they had breakfast. He had told Mr. Dunmore the previous evening of his meeting with his friends, and the latter now asked him, smiling, "If he had been having another chat with his chum?"

Harold acknowledged he had.

"I shall call on Mr. Lovelace this morning," said Mr. Dunmore. "I suppose you would wish me to do so, Peter, as his son is such an ally of yours?"

"I should like it very much," replied the boy, flushing, "for I am sure they would be glad to know you, Mr. Dunmore. Only——" he paused.

"Only what?" asked Mr. Dunmore.

"Only they will tell you something about me," said

Harold. "I hope it will not make you angry with me."

"No harm, I hope?" said Mr. Dunmore gravely.

"I don't know whether you will think it harm," said Harold.

"Had you not better tell me yourself?" asked Mr. Dunmore.

"I don't think I deceived you," went on Harold: "I told you Peter Wilkins was not my name."

"Yes, you did. Is there more to know?"

"Only that I ran away from home, and that I had no need to seek my fortune," said the boy shyly.

"Well, it does not seem easy for you to tell your own story," said Mr. Dunmore, "so I will ask it of your friends. What is your real name?"

"Harold Sinclair," he replied.

"Not a bad name," said Mr. Dunmore. "Well, I shall ask Mr. Lovelace about Harold Sinclair."

And Mr. Dunmore called that morning before luncheon on Mr. and Mrs. Lovelace, found them very agreeable people, and after a brief chat on indifferent subjects—on Sicily, Messina, etc.—heard from them the story of Harold's unloved and pinched youth, of his struggles to educate himself, of his friendship with Lance and Richard, and of his final flight from the lonely and penurious home in which he had been kept. And they, in turn, learnt how Harold had saved Mr. Dunmore's life, and had proved himself a lad of great sense, courage, and resources.

Mr. Lovelace listened with interest to this story.

"I think him a very fine lad," he said—"I always did, and I am thankful for his sake that he has found so good a friend."

"Are you angry with me?" asked Harold, when his benefactor entered the room, where the boy had been rather anxiously awaiting the result of his visit.

"No, my dear boy; I have no right to be angry. Your flight from home was a blessing for me, as it saved my life; and you had great excuses for leaving so churlish and avaricious a kinsman. But I must communicate at once with Sir Jasper, and tell him where his heir now is. In a worldly point of view your flight was very unwise, Harold. Had you really gone to sea, as you proposed, as a cabin-boy, your identity might have been very difficult to prove by-and-bye, and you might have figured as a second Claimant."

"But you will not make me go back to Uncle Jasper, if he wishes it?" asked Harold anxiously.

"My dear boy, I don't think, from what Mr. Lovelace tells me, that he will desire your return. I shall ask him to let you remain a year or two with me, and I shall undertake all your expenses during that time. I think he will hear reason."

"I think on those terms he will," said Harold, smiling; "and I can never thank you enough, Mr. Dunmore, for your goodness to me. Still, I ought not to be such an expense, and I fear you pay me more than my services deserve."

"Nonsense! You quite earn your pay," laughed his friend.

"But will you promise," urged Harold, "that I may repay you that which I *can* repay—the money part of your benevolence—when I succeed to my uncle's property?"

"You shall, if it will make you happier," said Mr. Dunmore. "And now come to luncheon; we have to

drive little Algy to the pastures afterwards, remember. And perhaps your friend Richard would like to come with us?"

"Oh, thank you, sir!" cried Harold, and ran off to ask his friend.

CHAPTER IX.

LANCE'S WATCH.

THE drive to the pastures was a delightful one. They extended—green meadows, full of the very sweetest flowers—from the edge of the sea to the bottom of the mountains. Over them were dotted groups of almond-trees and cypresses, and one huge chestnut spread its great branches over quite a large circle of grass.

Beneath this tree the cattle, belonging to the dairy-farm kept by Tedeo Soraci, had taken shelter from the noontide heat. He did not own all that range of pastures, they belonged to others also; his own meadows were those nearest to the city and the sea.

Soraci came out to meet them with courteous bows and civil compliments. He spoke a little French, a few words of English, and he could understand the Italian of Italy, from which, however, the dialect of Sicily differs a good deal—for example, the *l*'s of Tuscany become, in Sicily, *d*'s: thus *bella* is *bedda; e* and *o* become *i* and *u:* thus *padre* becomes *padri*, *sono*, *sunnu*. Nevertheless, Italian is understood by the Sicilians; the difficulty was rather with the Englishman understanding the Sicilian. However, Soraci was equal to the occasion: he consented, for a good "consideration," to allow Mr. Dun-

more to send his ward with the nurse daily to the dairy-farm, to drink milk warm from the cow, and to be allowed to run and play about in the meadow till his dinner-time; promising, for the same sum, to guarantee the perfect safety of the child and his attendant—a stipulation very necessary in Sicily outside the towns.

"My daughter," went on Soraci, "has been a *bonne* in Messina. She speaks French, and some English; she will look after the *bambino*."

And it was settled that little Algy should be driven out at early dawn to be in time for the milking in the pastures. And henceforward Harold, accompanied by Richard, frequently drove the child to his morning play-ground, and often lingered there till the time for his return.

The Lovelaces were still at Messina. Mrs. Lovelace was not very well, from over-fatigue in travelling, and her husband would not take her with him in his different excursions; but Richard occasionally went, and Harold with them. When they were not thus absent, they never failed to drive Algy and his Italian nurse to the farm, where the happy child played amidst the flower-enamelled grass, or chased butterflies across it with babyish glee.

Teresa, the daughter of the dairykeeper, was very friendly with the nurse and very kind to the child, who grew fond of her, and she managed to make the Italian nurse understand her. She was also very good-natured to the boys—gave them cups of milk and honey-cakes—and was especially pleased with Harold because he could speak a little Italian, which he had learned, as we have said, from his quaint old schoolmaster, who was proud of being able to read Dante, and liked to impart

his knowledge to his favourite pupil. It proved now to Harold a most useful accomplishment.

The boy had also been able of late to indulge his artistic tastes. With his first "pay," which Mr. Dunmore had advanced while they were still in London, he had bought himself a paint-box, brushes, and sketch-book, and had commenced using them off Cape St. Vincent, by painting the cliff with its salt sea fountain springing in foam through the rocks, and its grey convent on the summit. Mr. Dunmore, who was himself a good draughtsman, saw this attempt, and was so pleased with it, that he gave Harold a few hints on perspective, and when they landed at Messina presented him with some of his own colours. Harold, therefore, seized every opportunity of making sketches, and the pastures afforded him some lovely ones. When Dick was not with him — either through accompanying Mr. Lovelace on his excursions, or going out with the fisherman (who lived on the beach at the foot of the meadows) to fish or sail on the exquisitely sunny sea—Harold always drew for an hour or two; and he had at last ventured to ask Teresa if she would sit to him for her portrait. She was well fitted to be an artist's model—tall, powerful, with glorious dark eyes, and a brunette complexion lighted up by rosy cheeks, and lips as red as wet coral: she looked like a queen condescending to rural labour when milking her cows or goats.

Harold easily persuaded her to consent to sit to him, and her portrait was begun. They managed to keep up a broken conversation in French, Italian, English, and the Sicilian dialect; and Teresa asked many questions about the *Signori Inglesi* at the hotel, and about the small *cavaliere* who so often ran to her to give and receive a kiss.

But that which she chiefly enjoyed was Harold's reciting, from Tasso's "Gerusalemme" to her, passages he had learned by heart.

One morning, when Dick had gone out fishing, Harold sat painting diligently, Teresa seated on a tree-root before him, leaning on her brown arm in the attitude he desired, in her picturesque costume; the cows grazing beneath the chestnut-trees; beyond the trees the blue sea glittering in the sunlight, which gave also a golden glow to the rich grass of the meadow. The boy paused in his work a moment and glanced slowly round.

"How beautiful it is," he said, "your Sicily, Teresa! If I could paint well enough I should like to make a picture of you as Proserpine gathering flowers on the fields of Enna; you would make a splendid goddess."

"The signore is too good," said Teresa, flushing with pride; "but he could do anything he liked to try, and if he paints me as the Goddess Proserpina" (she knew the story well, it was a folk's tale of her isle), "perhaps he would give me the portrait he is doing now."

Harold laughed.

"Such a picture would be beyond me," he said; "but if you wish it, Teresina, I will make a copy of this portrait for you."

"Ah, *mille grazie!*" (thousands of thanks) cried the girl. "It is for a friend of mine I want it, one who has given me a fine present; he will be glad of it."

"He is a lover, I guess," said the boy.

"*Si, signore.* We are *promessi sposi*," she replied, "and he gave me on my *festa* a fine watch. Ah, perhaps the signore would look at it, for it does not go right—it keeps not time."

"I will regulate it for you if you like," said Harold.

"Then I will bring it," said the girl, springing up and hurrying away.

She returned in a minute or two, with a gold watch in her hand.

"It does not go now," she said, "and it is too slow when it does."

The watch had stopped.

"But where is the key?" he asked.

"Ah, I have lost it," she replied. "But has not the signore a key on his chain?" pointing to Harold's small watch-chain.

"Yes, but it may not fit your watch," he said, laughing. "However, we will try."

"My father has a watch and a key, but they big—very big," said Teresa, giving him the watch; "I tried the key, but it did not do."

Harold examined the watch; it looked like a very handsome English one. He opened it and tried his key; it did fit, but not very well, and as he turned it slowly and with care, he perceived something engraved on the raised gold lid of the watch-case. Harold was near-sighted; he bent down, and, looking at it closely, read:

"Presented by the visitors and residents at Pengarven to Lancelot Regan, etc., in acknowledgment of his heroism in rescuing a lad from death on August 12, 1870."

Harold nearly let the watch drop in his surprise and dismay. It was Lance's watch, given him for saving Harold's life! He could not speak for a moment, but during that moment he recovered his self-possession; it would not do to let Teresa know what he had seen.

"Teresa," he said; "you must have a key yourself, because the watch needs winding up every twenty-four hours."

TERESA SHOWS HAROLD LANCE'S WATCH.

"I know, signore," nodding her head; "my father's does likewise."

"Well, if you like, I will take your watch into Messina and get a key for it."

Teresa looked at him keenly for a moment.

"No," she said slowly; "I will wait and get one myself. Thanks to his Excellency all the same!"

And she held out her hand for the watch. Harold gave it to her with an air of indifference.

"It is a handsome watch; it must have cost much!" he said.

"Yes," said Teresa, holding it to her ear to hear it tick as Algy might have done.

"Your lover is rich, is he?" asked Harold, with restrained eagerness.

"No, alas, no! not yet," said the girl; "but he soon will be, and then he will hire the adjoining pastures at the foot of the hills, and we shall be married."

Harold rose.

"I see Dick coming up the beach," he said; "it is time to put up my painting."

And he replaced his brushes with hands that trembled so much, he feared Teresa would observe them. But she was engrossed with her watch. Soon after Richard joined him; he called to the nurse and Algy, and drove them home at a speed which drew a remonstrance from the nurse.

Then, the moment they entered the hotel, he grasped Richard's arm and exclaimed,

"Dick, Dick! I have just seen Lance's watch. He has been robbed of it, and perhaps murdered"

CHAPTER X.

AN INTERVIEW WITH TERESA.

RICHARD'S dismay when he heard Harold's story was extreme.

"Teresa to have it!" he exclaimed. "I can't believe she is a thief."

"But didn't I tell you her lover gave it to her?" said Harold; "*he* must be a robber, for Lance would never willingly have parted with that watch."

"No, he wouldn't," said Dick, thoughtfully; "I hope it was only stolen—I hope Lance is all right."

"I hope so too," exclaimed Harold. "But the matter must be inquired into at once. I tried to get the watch from Teresa, but she was too cunning to give it up; that makes me fear that she knows it was unfairly obtained."

"Come in and tell my father," said Dick: "the Regans are great friends of his, you know, and he will know what to do."

Harold went with him and related his discovery to Mr. Lovelace and his listening wife and daughter, who were greatly excited by the story.

"We must go to the police about it at once," said Mr. Lovelace, "though I fear they are not of much use here. However, the watch must be recovered, and Teresa must be made tell how her lover obtained it."

"Let me go and tell Mr. Dunmore before we start for the police office," said Harold; "he has been a good deal in Italy and Sicily, you know, and may suggest the best means of discovery."

Mr. Lovelace readily assented.

"Go and tell him at once," he said; "I will wait."

And Harold ran upstairs to their apartments and related to Mr. Dunmore his discovery of the watch.

"Lance's watch!" cried that gentleman; "and in Sicily? Lance is the lad who saved your life on the cliff, of which you told me, is he not?"

"Yes, sir," said Harold. "He sailed in the *Comus* for the Mediterranean, and must have landed here."

Mr. Dunmore looked very grave.

"You did not tell me," he said, "that your young friend was on board the *Comus*, or I should have mentioned to you that I had seen in a paper, while we were at Malta, an account of an accident to that ship, or, rather, to her crew. It stated that a boat from her went on shore at Messina with some men who had a day's leave—a midshipman in charge. They landed, were seen in the town, and embarked in the evening in their boat for the ship; a sudden gust of wind—common enough in these seas—overtook them, the boat was upset, and not one of those who had left for the shore was seen alive again. I think the midshipman's name was Regan."

Harold uttered a cry of pain and distress; he bowed his head upon his hands and wept bitterly.

Mr. Dunmore laid his hand kindly on his shoulder.

"I am sorry for you, my dear boy," he said; "but this watch seems to yield a gleam of hope that Lance may *possibly*—mind, I only say *possibly*—have been captured by brigands, and thus have not been in the boat; at any

rate, we can ascertain his fate through this watch. The body may have come on shore, and the watch have been on it; but that is scarcely likely, I think, as the watch is in such good condition; or he may have been robbed before he embarked in the boat. We must fully investigate the matter. Come, compose yourself, and go with me and Mr. Lovelace to the police station."

Harold, by a strong effort, and the aid of that gleam of hope of which Mr. Dunmore spoke, regained a little calmness, and followed his friend down to the Lovelaces' apartments, and from thence to the police station.

The police confirmed the newspaper report of the accident to the *Comus's* boat, and thought the watch might have been stolen from the midshipman before he embarked to return to his ship. But every inquiry should be made; they would undertake the case at once.

Nothing more could be done at the time, and they returned to the hotel, the two boys greatly depressed by the fate of their friend.

"It is 'we two,' not 'we three,' now," said Dick, sorrowfully.

They did not any of them go to the pastures the next day, nor did they hear from the police; but by-and-bye, as evening was closing in, a waiter came to Harold and told him that a person wished to see him—a young woman named Teresa. Harold obeyed the summons at once: he could at least question Teresa as to the fate of his friend. He found her wrapped in a cloak, the hood drawn over her head as if for disguise. She threw it back when she saw him, and he perceived that she had been weeping: her eyes were red and swollen, and her face pale.

"Oh, Signore 'Arold," she said, as he came up to her,

"I never would have believed that you could have been so cruel. To send the police to look at my watch and take it away from me! Ah, I should not have thought it was you who had done it if I had shown it to any one else; but I did not—only to you, only to you," with sobs.

Harold felt as much ashamed as if he had done something wrong.

"My poor Teresa," he said, "I am very sorry to have been obliged to pain you; but the watch belonged to a dear friend of mine, and I have inquired about it because I fear he may have been murdered by those who took it and gave it to you."

"Oh, no, he is alive," she said, "and well; the band only hold him till his ship returns. The English Queen will give a big ransom for her officer."

Harold felt as if he could have hugged her, he was so delighted at this information.

"Alive!" he cried. "Oh, my dear Teresa, is he alive?"

"Yes, signore, alive and well," she asserted.

"And where is he?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"He is with the Black Rovers on the hill," she said; "and they like him well. Look you, he might even join them if he would; they would forego his ransom."

"But how did they get him?" asked the boy.

"Well, he had leave to go on shore for a few hours, and he wandered about and climbed up to a part of the mountains where people may not safely venture. There he was found by Giovanni and two more of the band, and they seized him and carried him off: they knew the Queen of England would pay a large ransom for her young officer—the English pay well. Then of course they took his watch and purse, and Giovanni gave the

watch to me;" coolly: "they wait till his ship returns to treat of his ransom."

"Thank you for telling me this, Teresa," said Harold; "he must be ransomed—Mr. Dunmore and Mr. Lovelace will ransom him, I am sure, when they know about it."

"But I have lost my watch," said Teresa, disconsolately.

"You shall have another if Lance comes back safe," he said, gleefully.

"And they will give a good ransom?" she asked, greedily.

"We shall see—I must ask them." And he turned away, but she caught his arm.

"Listen, signore," she said. "If you will trust me to help you, I may get him released for a very small ransom—or, to speak truly,—for a present to Giovanni, my betrothed, who would then help him to escape. Signor Lancillotto has told them that he is poor; but perchance the Queen will ransom her young officer?"

"I don't believe she will," said Harold, bluntly.

"So I have said," replied Teresa. "Then it will fall on his father; therefore we had better see what bargain we can make with Giovanni."

"Teresa, you are a trump—I mean" (in Italian) "an excellent girl," said Harold.

"Well, Signor 'Arold, it will not do for the band to know of our plot; but I will send to-night for Giovanni to come to the pastures at dawn to-morrow, to speak to you about what he would take. Only, *ricordatevi*, remember, I trust to your honour as an Englishman that you will come alone, and that you will tell no one, not even your *padrone*, that I have been here or what you mean to do. If not, I will go, and you will hear no more of me."

Harold hesitated, and she saw that he did.

"Listen," she said: "it will be well for your friend if you can settle it easily; when there are disputes or delays the prisoners sometimes lose an ear or a nose, which are sent down to their friends to hasten matters."

Harold shuddered.

"They had better not hurt a hair of Lance's head," he said, "or we will show them no mercy."

Teresa laughed.

"You will have to get them into your power before you talk of mercy," she said, mockingly; "and the mountains are full of hiding-places. Will you keep the secret and come, or will you not?"

"I have a great mind to call Mr. Dunmore out to speak to you now at once," he said.

Teresa raised her large eyes to his face.

"What!" she said, "when I have trusted you?"

And Harold thought that he could not honourably announce her presence in the hotel, since he knew that it might cause her to be arrested; but still he hesitated as to going to the pastures alone.

"Well," she said, after a pause, "as you will; I can say no more, and I have risked a good deal to come here. If you settle with Giovanni, a small sum (nothing to rich Englishmen) will release your friend; if not—I can't tell."

And she turned to leave the hall.

"Stop," said Harold. "I will come at dawn."

"And alone? You will not tell the signori?" she asked.

"No, I will come alone," he said.

Teresa bowed, drew down her hood, and departed.

CHAPTER XI.

BETRAYED.

HAROLD rose with the earliest beam of light, dressed himself hastily, and hurried off to the dairy meadows. Teresa met him in the one where he usually sat to draw.

"Giovanni," she said, "is afraid of coming as far as this: he will meet us yonder," pointing to a distant field which lay almost at the foot of the mountains; for the dairy-farm was both near the sea and near the foot of the hills, which extend the whole length of Sicily on the north.

Harold nodded, and accompanied her across the fresh dewy pastures, the sweet morning air fanning his brow pleasantly.

"You will be well rewarded for this, if we get back our friend, Teresa," he said.

"Yes, I shall," she replied curtly, adding, after a pause, "I suppose the English signore will go up Mongibello?"

"Etna? Oh, yes; I think so," said Harold. "But now they will do nothing, I am certain, till we have learned all we can about Mr. Regan. I ought to do my best for him, Teresa, for he once saved my life." And he told the young Italian the story of his rescue on the cliff. Her black eyes flashed with admiration of Lance's

"Ah," she said, "it was brave! it was noble! You had an excuse for betraying me."

"Betraying you? But, Teresa, I meant you no harm."

"And you have done me no harm," she replied, with vivacity, "for Giovanni will let me go to the mountains with him, now I am threatened by the police for his sake. Yes; I shall not have to wait and wait till he has enough to buy a farm and satisfy my father as he wished; but a good priest whom the band know will marry us at once.—Giovanni!"

For while Harold was looking at her, surprised at her vehemence, a man had approached and stood by them.

"I am here, Teresina *mia*," he said. "Is this the young English gentleman?" (Of course we translate all the Italian.)

"Yes," she said; "this is Signor 'Arold."

"And I am ready to speak to you about Mr. Lance Regan's ransom," said Harold, smiling at the handsome dark-browed young fellow who stood by him.

"Yes, signore; and of your own," replied the bandit coolly.

Harold started: he saw at once that he was betrayed, and he darted a reproachful glance at Teresa. She nodded her head.

"Yes," she said, laughing; "I have, as you English say, 'tooked you in.'"

Harold made a slight movement; he was very swift of foot—he thought that he might regain the farm before the fellow could catch him. But Giovanni's quick eye detected the movement; he drew out a pistol.

"If you attempt to escape I will shoot you," he said.

"If you do," said Harold, dauntlessly, "you will die

for it: an Englishman has his country's shield over him, and England would avenge me."

This was a little grandiloquent, but Harold knew the people pretty well now, and he saw his words made an impression.

"Come quietly with me to your friend," said the bandit sullenly; "I don't want to shed your young blood."

"I will not go with you!" declared Harold, boldly confronting him.

Giovanni gave a whistle; three or four men sprang out of one of the thickets of brushwood which lined the edge of the pasture land, seized Harold, and bound his hands and feet. Then they raised him between two of them, and trotted off to the hill-side, while Harold uttered shout after shout for help, and did his best by struggling and wriggling to make it impossible for the fellows to hold him. He received at last, in return for his resistance, a blow on the head from his captors, which stunned him, and he did not recover consciousness for some little time. It was restored, probably, by the jerking of a mule, across whose back he had been thrown, and which was carrying him up the mountain-side. A groan which he gave attracted the attention of Giovanni, who ran by his side, and he heard Teresa's voice say,

"Let the *poverino* sit up; he is recovering."

And Giovanni stopped the mule, and took its burden off it.

"You may sit on it now," he said sullenly. "What's the use of giving so much trouble?" in a tone of injury.

Harold, whose head still ached, made no reply, but took his seat on the saddle, aided by Giovanni—for his hands were still firmly bound—and the bandit led his

mule. Teresa walked on the other side, and two of Giovanni's comrades followed them.

Harold now glanced round him, but could see nothing for a long time but tree-trunks standing thickly together, and an entangled underwood; the narrow and tortuous path scarcely permitted Teresa to walk by the side of the mule; she had often to follow it.

But by-and-bye there was a gap in the trees, and a vision of beauty burst upon the boy's sight. They had ascended a good way now, and below lay the fertile lands which surround Messina; a stretch of the bluest sea, dotted over with white felucca sails; while crags, covered with woods, formed the foreground. He uttered an involuntary exclamation of "Splendid!" Teresa, then walking by him, nodded her head.

"It is fine!" she said; "but by-and-bye, higher up, the signorino will see Mongibello."

Harold vouchsafed her no answer; he was thoroughly disgusted with both Teresa and himself—with her for her falsehood, with himself for his credulity. How could he have been so foolish as to have consented to come alone and secretly to the pastures? He acknowledged to himself that it had all come of conceit in himself; his luck in London about the bag had made him think himself equal to any business. They had travelled upwards a good way by noon, and then the heat, and Teresa's fatigue, rendered a rest necessary.

Harold guessed that they were going a roundabout way to the bandits' hold, in order that he might not learn the track. They lifted him off his mule and seated him under a tree, then, tying his ankles together and releasing his hands, they gave him some black bread, dried venison, and a few fresh figs, for his luncheon or dinner,

and offered him a drink of cool water from a trickling rill beside which they reclined. Had Harold not been a prisoner and in some danger, if not ransomed, he would have thought it a most delightful picnic; as it was, he reflected with some anxiety on Mr. Dunmore's displeasure when he should learn his folly and its consequences.

"It is too bad to have put him to such an expense," he thought, "for I know that he will pay my ransom. Uncle Jasper would never be persuaded to do so. Well, I must repay him by-and-bye."

After an hour's rest they again set out; but now Harold's eyes were bandaged as well as his hands tied, and his remonstrances and assurances of not revealing their retreat were treated with contemptuous silence.

It was growing cooler when again they paused, and he was lifted off and his eyes uncovered. He found then that he was in the presence of a small man, of about thirty-five, dressed in true bandit costume: high hat with scarlet ribbon tied round it near the top, a jacket bound with broad silver braid, open, and showing his white shirt, but reaching far below his waist; a cloak over one shoulder; and a broad leather belt edged with gold, in which were stuck pistols and a stiletto.

"Captain," said Giovanni, "this English youth is the adopted son of a rich milordo who is now at the Royal Hotel in Messina; he will fetch a good ransom."

The captain took off his hat and bowed to Harold.

"I am glad to make the signorino's acquaintance," he said courteously; "he is welcome to the mountains. But he has a black eye, Giovanni, and his face is swollen. I fear he gave trouble?"

"A little, Excellency," said Giovanni; "he wriggled like an eel, and we had to give him a pat."

The captain smiled; a cruel ferocious smile, Harold thought.

"Just to give him a hint as to our requirements," said he. "Now, Signor Inglese, understand. We will take your *parole d'honneur* not to escape. If you do not give it, you will be bound hand and foot till ransomed; if you do, you may roam about upon the plateau here as you please. If you go beyond it you will be shot for breaking your parole. Take him to our cave."

And Harold, after a vehement reply to the captain, in which he assured him that he was penniless himself—or nearly so—and that he was no relation and not an adopted son of Mr. Dunmore, was led away, and conducted again upwards, till he stood on a wide plain with gentle undulatious, which formed the summit of the mountain on which they were; lying, however, immediately below another lofty height, in which were several small and one large cave. The view from hence was glorious—the sea, the fertile lands, the magnificent chestnut forests through which they had passed, and, above all, the mighty cone of Etna—scarcely forty miles away—enchanted Harold. The sunlight cast a rosy tint upon the snows which crowned it, and he could have fancied it was a gleam of the hidden fires.

Then he followed Giovanni to the caves.

The first they entered was a large one, furnished in a rough but convenient fashion with stools, tables, and forms; there was also a kind of sideboard, richly carved, of old wood, an ancient and valuable piece of furniture, on which were flagons and the great glass bottles of the country, containing, doubtless, Lachryma Christi and Marsala—the *vin ordinaire.* Passing through this cave, Giovanni led him down a tortuous passage to a high but

narrow cave or cell, in which were two couches with beech-leaf mattresses and a coverlet on them, but no other furniture.

"This is your sleeping-cell," he said; "you will share it with the other English lad who is your friend."

Harold's heart beat with the sudden pleasure of soon seeing his friend.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"How should I know?" replied Giovanni, sullenly; "somewhere outside, I suppose. He's a pleasant lad enough, and our fellows like him; if he would join us we would not speak of ransom; but he won't."

"I should think not," muttered Harold to himself.

"He'll be here by-and-bye," said Giovanni,—"nay, *eccolo!* here he is."

And Harold, turning, saw Lance, and in another moment the boys had clasped hands in cordial greeting.

"Why, Harold, in the name of everything wonderful, how came you here?" cried Lance.

"On a mule, with my hands tied and eyes bandaged," laughed Harold, "and against my will, I assure you."

"But how came you in Sicily?" asked Lance, still wondering.

"Oh, it is a long story, which I will tell you by-and-bye. But how are you, Lance? You look very jolly, almost too heavy for our rope now," he said, with an affectionate smile.

"Yes, I am rather too fat; but the fellows are letting me take exercise now, and I shall soon be in better training. Sit down, old lad, and let us have a chat."

CHAPTER XII.

LANCE'S STORY.

LANCE listened with great interest and surprise to Harold's tale.

"You are quite a hero of romance," he said, laughing—"rescuing a gentleman from robbers, defeating the schemes of a villain, and now daring captivity to rescue a friend."

"The last was a big blunder," said Harold, laughing, "as it has made two prisoners to be ransomed instead of one. But, Lance, I am almost glad to have been such a goose, since it has brought me to you."

"I don't think you a goose," said Lance: "in fact, I am glad you can make a mistake sometimes, otherwise you would be too much like the Italian Mac——what is his name?"

"Machiavelli," suggested Harold.

"Yes, Machiavelli,—to be a good comrade."

"But, Lance, tell me now how you were taken," asked Harold.

"Well, I came on shore on leave with some men: one man was left in the boat while we went for a spree. The fellows wandered off to the wine-shops, and I went for a walk up the hills—was caught by four of these guys of bandits and carried off. In vain I told them that I was

a British officer: they didn't heed me the least; but they have since told me that they sent down one of their rascals well armed to the town, meaning to send a message to Captain Rivers to say that I was their prisoner, and held to ransom. But their messenger never had an opportunity of delivering his message, for the ship had sailed. Our boat had been seen to go down by the people on board, and of course Captain Rivers, thinking we had gone to Davy Jones's locker, made no inquiries on shore (or next to none), and sailed when he intended. However, as the bandits knew that either the *Comus* or some other man-o'-war will visit Messina by-and-bye, they keep me till that time arrives, and I must say are very civil to me. But meantime, Harold, only imagine the grief of my father, to whom they won't let me write—they fancy the Queen would pay a better ransom, the idiots! —he must believe that I am drowned."

"But think what his joy will be when he finds that you are alive," said Harold, in consolation. "He will be four times as happy as ever he was. And how do the bandits treat you?"

"Very well. They find me a good shot. I go out shooting with two or three of them now and then, for they know they can trust me as I am upon my parole; in fact, I was much pleased to find that they do not believe an officer of the Queen could break his word. But they are a set of low mean cads, Harold: thieves, and some of them murderers, mere dregs of the people, ignorant, vicious, and, I believe, cowardly. All the illusions one has about chivalrous outlaws and gentlemanly brigands fade away when brought face to face with them. But, Harold, there is one thing that has amazed me. I have seen European gentlemen here when I have myself been

unseen—a Russian, a Frenchman, even recently an Englishman has been in the caves—and from other observations I have made I believe that many, if not all, the gang are Socialists, and belong to a secret society. You see, I cannot speak their lingo, but I have caught up in the Mediterranean a few words of it, and I can put two and two together. The Englishman of whom I spoke was talking to the captain about a *bambino*—that is a baby or little child, you know—once when I passed him. It couldn't have been your London friend?"

"What was he like?" asked Harold eagerly.

"I only caught a passing glimpse at him, for he—and they all—kept carefully out of my way; but I know he was tall and fair."

"So was the man of the Embankment," said Harold; "but it could not be he—he is a gentleman."

Here they were interrupted by Giovanni calling them to supper, and they proceeded to the large cave, where Teresina and an aged crone were putting the last dishes on the long table. The brigands gathered round, or rather *along it*, rapidly. Harold found his place was by the captain on one hand, while Lance sat on the other. The captain was very polite to them, and Harold enjoyed the roast venison and wine, the maccaroni and sugar-cakes which followed; but they were disgusted by the conduct of their companions, who ate voraciously, often with their fingers, expectorated, swore, and indeed behaved as such low villains always do. The two young English gentlemen were disgusted. The captain, or "capitano," as they called him, was a little more civilized, and seemed of a higher class. In fact, he had once been a respectable Italian confectioner in Paris, but having in a fit of jealousy killed his wife, he was obliged to escape from justice; he

fled to Sicily, took to the mountains, and from his better education, his knowledge of French and smattering of English, had soon been elected the leader of the robbers. He was consequently able to converse in a medley of Italian, French, and English with the two boys.

After dinner the men took out cigars, and began a regular drinking bout, which the captain well knew might end in a drunken brawl, dangerous for his valuable guests; therefore he said he thought they had better accompany him to his room—which was next to the large cave—or they might go and sit outside under the eye of the sentinels who kept watch there.

They preferred the open air, and went out, pacing arm-in-arm up and down the plateau and listening to the cicalas in the wood till the sun sank in the sea, and the soft Sicilian twilight fell round them. They chatted of all that had happened since they parted: Lance had to tell of his pleasant messmates and of his voyage; Harold of their friends at the Cornish watering-place, of Dick's change of fortune, and of their unexpected meeting in Messina. The moon had risen and cast a silvery glory over all things before the captain joined them, and said he advised them to go to rest. The advice was a command, and the boys obeyed it at once; passing on their way to their cave the bandits in the larger apartment, who were lying about in drunken groups or resting their heads on the table, which was wet with upset wine and sprinkled with cigar-ashes.

"Circe's swine," whispered Harold.

"But Circe has retired," said Lance. "By-the-bye, Harold, she is very handsome, but how could you trust such a face? it has cunning painted on it."

Harold sighed. "Because I was a goose," he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERY.

THE boys rose very early next morning, and went out on the plateau of the mountains. The sun had not quite risen, but was just on the horizon, edging it with gold; the dew lay on the grass in pearls; the cicalas were already singing; the air was pure and sweet.

"If these men's lives were honest their existence here would be very pleasant," remarked Harold.

"Yes," said the young sailor, "if one had but a good sea boat below there."

"What a set of low ruffians they are," went on Harold. "I remember when I was a little chap of about ten, I had the wildest notions of bandits: I thought them unfortunate gentlemen, brave and chivalrous, and driven by oppression to the mountain fastnesses."

"I had also picturesque notions of them," said Lance. "But, hillo! look there, Harold."

Harold turned as desired, and beheld Teresa, in her full festival array, issuing from the cave with Giovanni and another bandit. She smiled at the lads, and said "*Buon giorno!*" as she passed them; but Harold took no notice of her,—he was disgusted at her treachery.

"Where is she going?" he asked Lance.

"To be married to Giovanni at the next village, I suppose," said Lance, "from her dress and his. Did you notice that the bandits were both dressed in villagers' attire—not in their usual garb?"

"Yes, I saw they were."

The lads were now called by the old woman to breakfast in the large cave, where they found the captain. He spoke civilly to them, pressed them to eat, and regretted that he had not better fare to set before them, though the roast kid and coffee served up were excellent. The captain evidently prided himself on his good manners.

After breakfast he told the lads that they would find some books in his cave, to which they were welcome. They accepted his permission to visit his cave more from curiosity as to the kind of place it might be than in hopes of finding books that would please them. It was certainly better furnished than the outer one, being hung with some curious tapestry, and having a silver lamp suspended from the roof. There were goat and deer-skins on the floor, and a fur counterpane on the couch. In a hole of the rock stood a few books—chiefly French—and Harold laughed as he drew out "Gil Blas."

"He also was in a robber's den," he said; "but I will have a look at the 'Decameron,' which is here also."

But though they each took a book, they read little that day, they had so much to talk about.

For two or three days the two friends were suffered to amuse themselves on the plateau, to which their outdoor life was limited, without any reference by the capitano to their ransoms; indeed, they were treated by the ex-confectioner with great civility. He evidently liked to air his bad French by conversing with them, and to increase his knowledge by asking them questions. When these,

however, related to the movements of their friends in Messina, or to their means, Harold was careful to avoid direct answers. He (the captain) also sought to inspire them with a liking for his own mode of life, especially Lance, for whom he seemed to have formed an affection. He boasted of the freedom and excitement of a bandit's life, and of the riches that might be amassed, on which one could, when one pleased, retire from the business, and was not at all offended by Lance's cool replies and far truer statement of the case; indeed, he seemed to admire the superior honesty and honour of his prisoner, though he declared, shaking his head, that 'cellenza's principles were not practical in this very bad world.

One day Lance asked him if inquiries had been made about Harold, adding, "However, of course they have."

"But, yes," allowed the captain, "he had had inquiries sent to him, and he had informed the English signori that Signor 'Arold was his prisoner; and there is a talk of ransom," he added; "but there is no hurry. There may be more to settle by-and-bye," significantly. "And I hope the signorini are not unhappy here—that they have all they wish?"

"So far we thank you for well treating us," said Harold. "But no one can be happy deprived of liberty."

The captain shrugged his shoulders and extended his hands, declaring that "that was a fine sentiment," and walked off.

"What can he mean," said Harold, as soon as they were alone, "by there being more to settle, perhaps, by-and-bye? Surely they are not laying snares for Mr. Dunmore or Mr. Lovelace or the ladies?"

"I don't know," said Lance thoughtfully. "The greater part of the band are absent. They are up to mischief of

some kind, of course, somewhere or the other. I wish, Harold, that we had not given our word not to attempt to escape."

"But if we had not we should have been shut up in one of those close, dirty, dark cells," replied Harold, "instead of sitting out here enjoying the sweet air, and looking down on beautiful Sicily. Besides, not knowing the roads down the mountain, and being sure to be pursued by those who do, how *could* we escape?"

"It would be worth risking it," said Lance "I have a little more idea of our position than you have, because the bandits have let me shoot with them once or twice—as a decoy, I fancy, to join them, or perhaps to inveigle me into it by making it appear that I had done so, and so rendering it dangerous for me to go back to my ship lest the Sicilian authorities should claim me. This last thought occurring to me when we met a peasant during our most recent excursion, who looked earnestly at me, I have declined to go again with them."

"You were right," said Harold; "but I wonder they trusted you with a gun."

"They put the most flattering trust in my *parole*," responded Lance; "and of course they are right: nothing would tempt me to break it."

"But we might tell them that we revoked it, and meant to escape if we could," said Harold.

"Yes, we might, and I think we will. Do you know, Harold, these mountains are full of caverns and subterraneous passages, where the bandits are perfectly safe from the pursuit of soldiers—the captain has told me so many times. Now, surely *we* might hide in them as well as the band, and by doubling on them, escape finally."

"It might be possible," said Harold.

"You see," continued Lance, "I am by no means sure that the Admiralty would ransom me; I don't know the least whether they would or not. My father would, of course, when he knows that I am not drowned, but here; but he is not a rich man, and I should be very glad to save him expense."

"Of course you would. As to Sir Jasper, I don't believe he would pay a penny to save my life: he would say I had no business here. Mr. Dunmore would pay for me, but I should be glad to save him such an expense, though by-and-bye I could of course repay him."

"Then we will revoke our *parole*, and do our best to get away," declared Lance.

"And as there is no time like the present, let us go to the captain at once, while the greater part of his gang are away," said Harold, rising.

"No, wait till to-morrow," exclaimed Lance, stopping him. "We must manage to get a little food together if we are to hide in the caves, and we shall have no chance when we are shut up in the prisons: they will feed us with bread and water only. I will go and ask if we may have our breakfast here under the trees, and then we can secrete a little meat and bread in the bushes."

Old Ridda, the woman who was servant to the bandits, good-naturedly assented to Lance's request, and he reappeared laden with a huge brown dish of cold roast kid and a loaf of bread. A portion of this was at once cut off and concealed on a rough projection inside the hollow trunk of a huge chestnut-tree, and then Lance and Harold sat down to eat their noontide breakfast, for —according to the custom of the country—they had only a draught of milk and piece of bread at the earlier meal.

The scene before them was more beautiful than the

imagination can conceive. They sat under the shade of one of those great chestnut-trees which grow to so vast a size in Sicily; before them the mountain sloped downwards, richly wooded; and on the great crowns of oak and chestnut the midday sun threw a perfect glory of golden light; at the foot of the mountain stretched plains which were dotted over by dwellings, and covered with sheep or herds of cows; here and there were the great gardens of the bee-masters—these extended up the side of the mountain a considerable way, and filled the air with delicious perfumes. Far beyond the gardens and pastures lay the radiant sea. Turning their heads, they could see the lofty cone of Etna glittering in sunlight.

To Harold's artistic taste the scene was so charming it seemed to atone for his captivity. As they ate their noonday meal they discussed the possibilities of escape, and, with boyish love of excitement, longed for its difficulties and dangers.

The day passed much as usual, and moonlight was resting in silvery beauty on the mountain. Harold had retired to the cell for the night with Lance, but the heat there was great, and he did not feel inclined to sleep.

After tossing about for some time, he rose, put on a few garments, and went to the great cave, intending to go out on the plateau for half an hour in the moonlight. At the mouth of the cave, however, he was stopped by the sentinel's rifle being laid across it.

"You cannot go out," said the man; "the captain is there with a friend."

"Oh, dear!" said Harold, in his queer Sicilian, "it is so hot in our cave. May I stand here then, and breathe the fresh air, good Guiseppe?"

"*Bene*, I should think there is no harm in that, signore,"

said the man; "neither you nor I can hear what they say."

And Harold, thanking him, leant against the side of the cave, inhaling the sweet perfumed air of night; but suddenly he started, and the sentinel, turning to him, said, "What is it?"

"A bat, I think," stammered Harold, pointing to one flitting by.

"And you are afraid of it?" said the sentinel: talking was by no means forbidden to the ill-disciplined sentinels of the band. "Well, that is strange; it cannot harm you."

"But I dislike bats very much," said Harold, peering forward and gazing out of the cave.

"H'm!" said the sentinel, resuming his pacing up and down before the cave entrance. Harold stood watching. At length, as the man again stopped, he said,

"I am cooler, and will go in, Guiseppe; the captain might not like to find me here. Good night, and thanks."

"Good night!" said Guiseppe. "You are right, he mightn't like it, though it was no harm. You needn't speak of it."

"I will not, I assure you," replied Harold.

Then he hurried back to his cave.

Lance was sleeping profoundly—his arm under his head. He was a boy who seldom had cause to complain of sleeplessness. Harold knelt down by him and shook him slightly, whispering "Lance." The lad woke at once with the readiness of a seaman, whom a whisper can rouse, though a tempest might not, and seeing Harold's face close to his own, asked at once in a low tone,

"What is the matter?"

"Lance," said his friend, "do you remember my telling

you of Mr. Dunmore's cousin who stole those papers which were so important for little Algy?"

"Yes, I do. What a cad he must be!"

"He is," said Harold; "but what do you think? I have just seen him."

"How? In your dreams?" asked Lance, stretching his arms up over his head.

"No; alive—here, and talking to the captain. I think it must have been he whom you saw, Lance."

"You must surely be mistaken," said Lance; "Mr. Dunmore would not send *him* about your ransom."

"No; I know he would not, and he cannot have come here about us. But I could not be mistaken; he is so wonderfully like *my* Mr. Dunmore."

"But on friendly terms with the captain of this gang of thieves, and he an English gentleman! It can't be, Harold. Most likely he is a prisoner as we are."

"Oh! you would not think so if you saw how obsequious the captain was to him—walking with his hat in his hand, and bowing every moment. It would have amused me, only that I fear the said gentleman is up to no good."

"He had better not come athwart my hawse," laughed Lance. "How came you to see him, Harold?"

Harold explained.

"It is a strange thing, certainly," said Lance. "If these fellows could be hired for bravoes, one would think he had come to engage one."

"Perhaps they can be," said Harold thoughtfully; "and both Mr. Dunmore and Algy are in Giles Dunmore's way."

"But what can we do to save them—unless we escape as soon as possible?" asked Lance.

"I don't know," said Harold; "but I think *I* must wait here. It is not impossible that it is the child Giles Dunmore is after. Perhaps it may be brought here, you see."

"Well," said Lance in a sleepy tone, "night brings counsel; let us think it out, and see what can be done to-morrow."

And in proof of the profoundness of his thinking he shortly after snored. Harold also soon after fell asleep, and they neither of them awoke early.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TERRIBLE SECRET.

THE boys woke with a feeling of oppression and anxiety. They foresaw that to take back their *parole* would assuredly make them closer prisoners, and so carefully guarded, that there would be scarcely a hope of a successful attempt at escape.

Lance also, on examining their hoard in the tree, found that the meat he had laid by had been gnawed by some creature—a rat, or something else—and began to perceive the difficulty of getting a supply of provisions for any lengthened period of wandering in the caves. While they sat, towards sunset, still discussing in low tones what they should do, they heard footsteps, the tramp of men coming up the mountain-side, the sound of voices, and a laugh, which the mountain re-echoed.

"The band have returned," said Lance.

And the next moment there appeared on the plateau five or six bandits, escorting a woman whom they recognized at once as Teresa. She had a crying child in her arms, and she herself looked vexed and sullen; the men were shouting and laughing, full of glee at the success of their enterprise. Harold, with a dreadful suspicion in his mind, went up to the woman and spoke to her. At the sound of his voice the child turned a tearful face round, then clapped his little hands and cried,

"Harold, *dear* Harold!"

Harold sprang forward in a moment and took the boy in his arms, while Algy clasped him round the neck and laid his fair cheek against the boy's.

"You wicked woman!" cried Harold furiously, clasping the little one tightly. "Have you even betrayed this innocent?"

She came close to him and said in a low voice, in her broken English,

"No; not mine doing—captain ordered—men seized him. I am sorry!"

"Come, come!" cried a loud voice from the leader of the party; "carry that youngster to the captain."

"I will take him," said Harold boldly; "he will go quietly with me."

And he walked away leading the child. Teresa lingered and looked significantly at Lance (she had occasionally spoken to him since her return from her wedding), but her husband called her to follow him, and she could only point unseen to the hollow chestnut-tree before she was obliged to obey.

Harold led the child up to Captain Riccardo.

"This is a very small prisoner, Signor Capitano," he said; "but, I think, a more valuable one than any you have taken lately."

"*Ah!*" cried Giovanni, greed sparkling in his eyes; "and he is my prize, capitano. I shall demand a good share of his ransom."

"But we helped you!" cried several voices.

Harold observed—the boy had the quickest eye for observation we have ever known—that Captain Riccardo turned suddenly so pale that he looked ghastly.

"His father is no doubt rich," he stammered.

"Mr. Dunmore is not his father," said Harold, "he is only Algy's guardian; but the little fellow is very rich himself, and if he is taken care of, and returned safely, he will be paid for nobly."

He uttered this information, as he had the first, in slow and distinct Italian, giving it as much of the Sicilian dialect, which he had picked up, as he could: he wanted the men to understand him; and that they did so was manifest by a murmur of applause which followed his words.

"It is a good day's work," said Giovanni, grinning.

The little boy, who was a brave child in his baby way, had been looking earnestly meantime at the captain, and now, meeting his eye, smiled his lovely infantine smile, and put out his tiny hand. The captain took it, patted his cheek, murmured something about a "pretty little one," and turned away with a look of absolute pain on his face.

"What for have they brought me here, Halald?" asked little Algy. "Was it to see you? Will you take me home again?"

"I hope so," said Harold. "Where did they find you?"

"We was p'aying about in the meadows ever so long," said Algy, "but Tesa wasn't there; and by-bye we were doin' home in the tarriage, when ever so many men jumped out of the trees and taught the horse's head and took me out. Nurse sk'eemed, and I c'ied too vely loud, but nobody tum, and I toudn't get away f'om the naughty men. They tarried me away, and the toachman drove on with nursey ever so fast; and we went up the hill. And by-and-bye Tesa come; and she stolded and c'ied, and took me away from the men and tarried me herself. So I tum here."

Harold kissed the poor child.

"I will take care of you," he said, "now, till we get back to guardy."

Algy smiled delighted, and Harold, unopposed by the men—who had now gathered outside the centre cave, and were calling loudly to old Ridda to bring them their dinner quickly—led the little boy away, and tried to amuse him on the plateau till dinner should be ready. But Algy was hungry; it was long past his hour for dinner, and the air of the mountains sharpened his appetite. He began to ask for "somefing to eat," and even to whimper for it, and Harold was glad when the shout of "Dinner" sounded on the air; he took Algy into the cave, and seated him beside himself. The captain—taking his place at the head of the table—perceived it, and frowned.

"Had not the child better go to Teresa?" he asked; "she will feed it."

"Thanks!" said Harold; "but I don't find him any trouble."

And he cut up some kid, and strewed bread and salt on it for Algy, who ate it with great gusto, and soon began to chatter to the captain himself, who, however, was in a morose fit, and would not respond to the little child's efforts at being agreeable. He (the captain) in fact, ate little himself, but drank more than usual, and grew more morose and ferocious-looking after every cup of wine he swallowed, till Algy grew frightened at his flushed stern face and gloomy frown, and nestled closer to his boy friend.

Harold was glad when he could escape from the cave, and take Algy into the air again. The child was sleepy now, and slumbered tranquilly on the boy's knees. It

was rather dull for Harold, having thus to act the part of nursemaid; and he thought it a little remiss of Lance not to come and sit by him and chat. But Lance was better employed; he had understood Teresa's sign, and he hovered about the chestnut-tree till dinner-time, returning to it as soon as he and Harold left the cave—where the men were set in for a drinking bout, the captain this time with them.

Lance saw, as he approached it, a finger issue from the hollow trunk and beckon to him; he instantly obeyed the summons, and found Teresa inside it. The hollow tree would hold several persons. She made a sign of caution, and then said in French,

"I want to tell you something. It would be better if I spoke to the Signor Harold; but he would not listen to me, perhaps, he is so angry. So you must warn him. The *bambino*—the infant—is in danger. Last night a man I know came and talked to the captain; he, bad man" (in English), "very bad! I listened to what they say in cave, and he ordered the captain to send men to carry off the child that goes to drink the milk of Sorace's cows, and to *kill him*."

Lance exclaimed, horrorstruck, "Good heaven!"

Teresa laid her hand on his arm.

"The captain," she said emphatically, "is not a bravo—he never kills in what you call *murder*, only in fight, or to defend himself. He cried out just as you did; but the other said, 'Remember your oath! You must obey. This child is condemned and sentenced—to punish his family, and give his money to the cause.' The captain said, sulky like, 'If I must I must; but, if we take him, the band will not permit me to deprive them of his ransom.' 'They may be made to think it an accident,' said

this Judas: 'the child can fall over the cliff. You must manage it. You know well that you may not receive money for a life sentenced, and which you are ordered to take. So there is no question of paying.' The captain nodded, and then they went out and walked on the plateau, and I heard no more."

Lance was horrified.

"But how," asked he, "can he make the captain obey him in such a case?"

"Ah! know you not?" said Teresa. "He belongs to a secret society. I knew that before, for since we have been here old Ridda has asked me to clean and keep the captain's chamber, and I found hidden in it this piece of paper, which I could read, and did." And she drew a piece of printed paper from her pocket. "Read it," she said to Lance.

It was in French, and ran thus:—

"Everybody, without distinction of religion or nationality, can belong to the Society. Applications for admission must be made through members, and every candidate must be sworn in as soon as elected. His real name must be given up to the President and to his sponsor. The President, and six members chosen by him, form the Executive power. Every member is bound to obey the orders of the President, even if they clash with his own interests, as the welfare of the Society goes before that of private individuals. The President calls meetings together every now and then. Members attend armed. Every member must have a gun, a six-barrelled revolver, a dagger, and ammunition. The Society will endeavour to set free any member who may be arrested, and will provide for the families of members deceased, imprisoned, or banished."

Lance read the paper with attention.

"It is part of the rules of a secret society, indeed!" he said. "Do the rest of the band belong to it, Teresa?"

"I don't know about all. My Giovanni does not. I have heard him say it makes men slaves and worse; but the captain is more French than Sicilian, you see."

"Thank you very much, Teresa!" said Lance, "for letting me know this. I will tell Harold, and I am sure he will forgive you his own captivity on account of your goodness now."

"Ah!" said Teresa, "I meant no harm; the English *giovane* will only have had a trip to the mountains. I did it for *mio* Giovanni, you know. But I love the little English child, and I could not bear to think of it crushed and bleeding at the mountain's foot. Besides, why should Giovanni be robbed of his share of the ransom—which would be high? Perchance with it he might be rich enough to leave this life, and set up as a bee-master; *chi sa?*"

"Teresa," said Lance, "I know that if you and Giovanni could manage to get the child back safely to Mr. Dunmore, he would get your husband's pardon from the Government, and give you enough to make you rich for life."

"You think so, signore?" with sparkling eyes.

"Yes, I am sure."

"I should be glad," she said with a sigh, "for I love the life of the plains; I do not care for this life as I thought I should. Old Ridda has nothing to talk about; Giovanni is jealous and won't let me speak to any of the band; and it is very dull. I clean, for Ridda, the captain's cell; I milk their cows; and I shall make the butter. But there is no one to gossip with; no *festas*

here, nor shops. That is hard for a girl who has lived all her life nearly in Messina."

"Well, Teresa, you must think it over; and if Giovanni can be gained to help us—'who knows?' as you say."

"And you will tell Signor Harold not to let the child out of his sight, unless it is with me or Giovanni?" she said.

"I will tell him at once," said Lance; and, wishing the woman "good bye," he left the tree, and went and seated himself by Harold, to whom in a low voice—lest he should wake the sleeping child—he related his interview with Teresa and her information.

It is possible that Harold, in his profound distrust of his treacherous model, might not have believed Teresa's story, if he had not himself seen Giles Dunmore, and known his motive for wishing to remove the little baronet. As it was, he believed and despaired.

"I don't see how we can save the poor little chap, Lance," he said, "if the captain is really bent on killing him."

"Well," said Lance, "we could appeal to the band. They won't like to be taken in and lose their share of a big ransom."

"But many of them may be also members of the secret society," replied Harold; "and then they must obey."

"Be sure the greater number are not," declared Lance. "And, anyhow, the ransom is a great holdfast for us; but we must watch carefully that the miserable captain does not put the poor little fellow secretly out of the way. Let him eat only meat, and bread from the loaf they all cut from, Harold; and get Teresa to milk a cow for him, and not let the milk out of her own hands."

The rest of that anxious day passed off quietly. The

captain made no sign of taking the child away from the boys; he suffered Algy to sleep with Harold, and the boys kept watch in turn all night over the doomed child. In the morning Teresa came to wash and dress him. There was no door to the cave, and she feared the child understanding her also; therefore she dared not do more than whisper to Lance,

"Come to the hollow tree while the men drink to-night."

He nodded assent; and Harold, in token of forgiveness, extended his hand to her, which she took, and, after the fashion of her country, kissed—much to the lad's confusion.

That morning, soon after breakfast, a bandit came and summoned the two lads to the cave to speak to the captain. They obeyed, leaving Algy with Teresa, who suddenly appeared on the scene. They found all the band assembled in the great cave, except those out on guard about the mountain; the captain sat at the head of the table, and before him were pens, ink, paper, and a sand-box.

"Signorini," he said, addressing the lads, "we wish to speak to you about your ransoms. Signor Lancillotto," to Lance, "we shall no longer wait for your ship to return; doubtless your rich friends in Messina will ransom you."

Lance interrupted him to protest that he had no claim on Mr. Lovelace or Mr. Dunmore, and that it was quite impossible to expect them to ransom him; but the captain listened with a stubborn look on his face.

"We shall see," he said. "Now, Signor 'Arold, you will write in English what I also shall write in French; and you will say that, holding you two aad the rich

bambino, we are willing to arrange for an equitable and moderate ransom. For each of you young gentlemen we ask two thousand crowns; for the *bambino* two thousand more. If not paid, by the laws of the band you will all three be put to death. I said well, my comrades?"

A murmur of approval went round.

"Now write," he said.

Harold took the pen and wrote as the bandit dictated, with many ceremonious expressions (with which Italian epistles are generally full), the exorbitant demand which he was pleased to style "moderate."

"Add, now," said the captain, as Harold paused, "that if this ransom is not sent immediately—that is, in three days—to the inn of the Eagle, at the foot of the mountain, I shall have the honour of sending your ears, and the *bambino's*, to them as a reminder."

Harold wrote, and added something of his own.

"What is this at the end? 'I write——' What?" asked the captain, taking the paper from the boy, and looking peeringly at it to make out the English words.

"It is 'I write from dictation; do as you think best. As to our ears, Lance and I *don't care*."

The captain looked savagely at him.

"H'm!" he said; "but you *will* care. *N'importe*—your courage and generosity will appeal to your friends."

"By whom will you send this letter?" asked Harold.

"By a man I can trust," was the curt reply. "The signori need not trouble themselves about it."

And he waved a dismissal to them.

"So he puts Algy to ransom after all," said Harold.

"That is a *ruse* to deceive the band," replied Lance. "I expect that the letter will not reach the hands of Mr. Dunmore in time to save Algy's life."

CHAPTER XV.

FEARS AND PERILS.

THE hours of that hot sunshine seemed endless to the anxious boys, as they waited for the bandits' dinner hour, which was not very early. It came at last, however, and they went in with Algy, who had had his dinner that day with Teresa, but whom Harold still kept near him, though the captain frowned and said the child should be with his nurse. The meal seemed endless also, till the captain gave them leave to depart, and the men—their generally temperate leader still remaining with them—settled down to their usual debauch.

Lance flew at once to the hollow chestnut-tree, where he found Teresa awaiting him; she was evidently greatly excited.

"The captain is a traitor to the band!" she exclaimed. "He has given directions to Paolo, the man who is his slave, *not* to reach the town in time for the ransom to arrive at the fixed day. I heard it all."

"But how," cried Lance with sudden curiosity, "how do you manage to hear everything?"

"Listen. The last captain had a place in the rock scooped out—high up—from whence he used to look down on the men and listen to what they said. A true

Dionysius's ear! Well, I found it out, *davvero*, I did, before I had been here four and twenty hours, and I listen often. That is how I heard the stranger talk to Riccardo; that is how I have heard his new treason."

She paused; she had talked herself out of breath.

"But what is to be done?" asked practical Lance.

"I have told all to Giovanni; he is furious at the cheat. Look you, it is such a loss to him! He is not sure of all the band, or he would tell them how the captain is going to cheat them out of all those thousands of crowns. Some may be members of the society, you see. If all were like Giovanni he would tell them, and they would shoot the captain, and choose a fresh one who was not a slave to a vow; but he fears it cannot be done."

Again she paused.

"Why does he not agree to my proposal," said Lance, "and escape with us all? He would get his pardon and a good sum—enough to set him up as a bee-master."

"He is thinking about it," said Teresa. "Come here to-morrow at this hour, and if he consents he will meet you here. I dare stay no longer."

Lance followed her into the open air, and she passed unseen to the part of the caves appropriated to herself and Ridda. Lance went thoughtfully back to Harold, who was watching little Algy playing on the grass; he told Harold all that had passed with Teresa.

"There is hope, then," said Harold; "it is greatly to their interests to help us, therefore we shall be helped. No immediate danger threatens little Algy?"

"I hope not," replied Lance; "but don't let him eat anything the captain may give him in the shape of sweets and cake; these Italians are subtle poisoners."

"I will persuade the poor little chap to bring every-

thing he gives him to me," said Harold. "He is such a generous little fellow, he will do it, and then I shall throw them away."

"The sweets have to be made first, I expect," said Lance; "and it is a capital thing for us that he dares not risk exasperating the band by any open action."

By-and-bye the captain himself appeared on the scene, and Algy, who had taken rather a fancy to him, ran instantly to meet him, and clasped his little arms round his knees, looking up laughing in his face. To Harold's surprise that stern face softened; the captain's eyes looked to him actually humid. The man kissed the child, who patted his cheeks with his little hands and laughed. Riccardo carried him to where Harold sat, and threw himself on the grass beside him, keeping the child in his arms.

"Has this little creature a mother?" he asked the boy abruptly.

"No; neither father nor mother," replied Harold; "he is God's child," he added in Sicilian.

The captain shivered.

"*Poveretto!*" he murmured; "his will be a lonely childhood. It were well if his Heavenly Father took him to Paradise."

"Well," said Harold, "I am in a like case. I am an orphan; but I don't want to be taken to Paradise just yet on account of that. I hope to do something in this world first; and Algy may grow up a great and useful man, you know. As God has not called him to Himself by his last illness, we may hope He means Algy to live —and HIS will is supreme."

Again a strange shiver passed through the captain's strong frame.

"You shiver," said Harold. "Do you know what we say in England when one shivers like that?"

"No," replied the captain.

"We say, 'Some one is walking over our grave,'" the boy informed him.

"Ah!" said Riccardo, "a strange notion. The Arabs have taught the Sicilians that it means an evil spirit is near; but these are old women's fancies. Tell me, if you can, something of the little one's parents."

"His father was Sir Algernon Dunmore," replied Harold, who had had all his information from Mr. Dunmore, "who was a friend to Italy, and at one time a friend also of Mazzini and the patriots. He was much in Italy; he fought under Garibaldi, and he married an Italian lady, but he did not let his friends know of his marriage, because at that time he was not Sir Algernon—his father was alive, and was very angry with him for his Italian sympathies, and would not have received his wife. But the old gentleman died; Sir Algernon—as he had become then—went home to the funeral, and did not return immediately to Italy or send for his wife, though it seems he meant to have her home (he had written to tell her so); but he was thrown from his horse when hunting, and killed on the spot. Well, then, Mr. Dunmore, his cousin, came into the baronetcy and fortune; but soon after he had a letter from little Algy's mother, telling him who she was, and of Algy's birth. Then Mr. Dunmore went to her; she did not live long after her husband, and he has taken care of little Algy ever since, and gave up to him (as soon as he had proofs of the marriage) both his title and fortune."

"A most generous man!" said Captain Riccardo; "but then he is no longer rich himself?"

"Oh, yes! he is; he had a good property of his own from his father," replied Harold.

Captain Riccardo reflected a little.

"Tell me," he said, "have you ever heard whether this Sir Algernon who is dead was ever a *Carbonaro*—I mean, one of a secret society of patriots?"

"I never heard that he was," said Harold. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh! for nothing—simply curiosity," said the captain, shrugging his shoulders. "Ah! thou art impatient, my little one," as he let Algy, who was now struggling to get away from him, out of his arms.

There was a pause; then Riccardo rose.

"I hope the signori will shortly be free," he said. "*Addio!*" And he returned to the cave.

Harold thought over the captain's words in connection with what he already knew of the Dunmore history. The friend of Mazzini might possibly belong to the *Carbonari*. Had he ever betrayed them? And was his child therefore doomed to the punishment he had escaped? If so, poor little Algy's life promised to be a short one; but Harold did not believe this.

"It is a pretence of Giles Dunmore's," he thought, "to get the inheritance for himself. No society could be so wicked, even if they should gain by such a deed; yet, if Riccardo believes him, the danger is the same for the child."

By-and-bye Teresa came to take Algy away to his tea. Before she arrived, however, Harold had won a promise from the child that he would not eat any sweetmeats till he had shown them to Harold.

"Not from any one," he impressed upon the child, "for fear they should make Algy ill."

And Harold knew that the little fellow understood and would faithfully keep a promise.

Towards evening the brigands began to assemble on the plateau to talk and smoke, and formed picturesque groups under the trees. Giovanni was one of the number, and Harold thought he perceived that the bandit tried to make himself popular with his companions: flattering the prowess of one, laughing at the jests of another, and often speaking of the big ransom to be gained for the baby boy. The boys went early to rest, to relieve Teresa, who sat in their cave with Algy till they came.

The little child lay sleeping peacefully; his hands clasped on the coverlet, his cheeks flushed with a lovely crimson. Teresa sat beside him, watching him; she rose as the boys entered.

"The captain came just now," she said, "and gave the *bambino* some chocolate creams; but would you think it? He has not eaten them, the sweet lamb! He has kept them for Signor Harold."

"Where are they?" asked Harold.

"Under his pillow, signore," replied Teresa.

Harold felt for the little package, and secured it in his pocket.

"It is well for Algy that Mr. Dunmore has taught him to keep a promise," he thought.

The night passed quietly, and Harold rose from sleep thankful, as he never had been before, that they had been watched over, and the child protected during their slumbers, by Divine Providence. It is when we are in perils from which we are powerless to deliver ourselves, that we feel how good it is to have an Almighty Protector strong to save.

That day had apparently also no danger. Algy had been quite content, when he heard that Harold had his "sweeties," to give them up to his keeping, to be eaten "by-and-bye."

The captain was gone away "on business," the lieutenant told the boys at breakfast, and the atmosphere felt the clearer for his absence; but they saw his feather coming up the mountain-side just before dinner, and—a little uneasy at all his movements—they studied his face as he approached them. It wore a sullen scowl, which promised little good to his prisoners; and when Algy ran up to him he put the child aside with a muttered oath. At dinner also he looked surly and ill pleased; but he drank a good deal of wine, and did not leave the table when the boys did. Lance, as soon as they could get away, hastened to the usual trysting-place, and on entering the hollow chestnut, found himself face to face with Giovanni.

CHAPTER XVI.

ENGLISH BOYS' HONOUR.

THE bandit bowed and grinned.

"So, Giovanni!" cried Lance, "Teresa has sent you?"

"She has, signore," replied Giovanni, in broken but intelligible English; "and I came to say that since the captain means to cheat us all, I will forestall him, and cheat the captain." And he gave a gruff laugh.

"You are right," said Lance, smiling; "and you will find it to your advantage."

"*Ebbene!*" said the bandit. "Now we must t'ink of our escape. The signori will promise me *in handwriting* that I shall receive the ransom myself, for me and my comrades, which the band have demanded for themselves?"

"We will give you a written promise for that sum," said Lance, fully aware of the value which Mr. Dunmore would set upon the child. "When shall we have it ready, *amico?*"

"To-night," said Giovanni, "for we must escape at midnight. A comrade of mine will be on guard at the mouth of the cave; I shall be on guard down below, where he will lead you. Then we must hasten; it will

not be easy to escape the lower circle of guards, but the money makes it to us worth the risk."

"We shall be truly grateful to you," said Lance; "and this evening Signor Harold and I will tell the captain that we re-take our *parole*, and mean to do our best to escape."

"But," cried Giovanni, aghast, "to do so will rouse the captain's suspicions, signore. You must not do it. It is because he trusts you that we shall the more easily escape."

"For the same reason—because he trusts us," said Lance, "we cannot break our word. No English boy with any sense of honour would break a promise."

"Then you may as well say you will not escape!" declared Giovanni.

"Oh, no! If we tell him that we re-take our *parole*, and will escape the first opportunity, he can have nothing to reproach us with; but we may escape."

Giovanni was very discontented; he muttered remonstrances, and at last threats. But Lance was firm; he would not win liberty at the cost of honour. At length the Italian was obliged to yield.

"You will be imprisoned in the cells," said Giovanni; "and how can we get you out?"

"You probably know how," said Lance; "if not, why, we must stay in them, and you will lose your ransom."

Giovanni might have insisted still longer on his view of the case, but he dared not linger longer, and after reconnoitring the plateau carefully, through a small hole in the trunk, he managed to steal away unseen. Lance, after a brief interval, followed him, and hastened to Harold to tell him what he had heard.

The boys' hearts beat high with hope and excitement,

and also with some little anxiety, for if they failed in their attempt they had not much mercy to expect from the ferocious Riccardo.

"After all, though," said Harold, "*we* also are worth money to him; he won't kill us willingly. But poor little Algy would be a certain victim."

"He would either way," said Lance; "to escape is the poor little fellow's sole chance for life."

The two lads watched the sun set that evening with emotions they had never experienced before in their young lives. They might never see it rise again, or might see it with the memory of a poor slaughtered babe to haunt them all their days.

At last twilight closed down — the brief grey which lasts so very short a time in Sicily — to be succeeded by the starlight which is so bright and clear there; and they were summoned to supper, Teresa having shortly before borne off Algy to bed. The boys took care to eat a good supper, for they thought they might perhaps need all their strength. When the supper was over, Lance rose and turned to the captain.

"Captain Riccardo," he said in French, "my friend and myself have been reflecting on the terms you have demanded from our friends as our ransom. We think we have no right to tax them so heavily, and we beg now to take back our *parole*, and to inform you that we mean to escape the first opportunity."

"That is so," assented Harold.

Captain Riccardo twisted round on his seat and stared at them, pulling his long moustache furiously.

"You will escape," he hissed between his teeth, "young rascals? I will shoot you first. Here, Pietro, Giacomo; take these young *coquins* off to the prison cells, and take

care that they don't come out till their ransom arrives. I will teach you to insult and defraud the band like this!"

The two bandits named, who were the very lowest—except, perhaps, the absent Paolo—of the band, at once advanced. Lance and Harold did not attempt to make any resistance.

"The word of an Englishman," said Lance, turning to the captain, "is more binding than your prison cells. We are free of *that* bond, now."

"Cut off his ears!" shouted Riccardo.

But the brigands, with whom the boys had become rather favourites, appeared not to hear, and taking an arm of each boy, led them away unresisting to the prison cells, which were two inner caves down a long passage in the rock, about a quarter of a mile below the great cavern. These caves were shut in by heavy iron doors. Into one of these the two boys were thrust by Pietro.

"No need to give more than one the trouble of watching you," grinned Giacomo; "since there is plenty of room for both here. Pietro will be at the end of the passage."

Then he closed and locked the door, and the boys heard the brigands' retreating footsteps re-echoing in the rocky passage. They were in utter darkness, and the cave smelt damp and like a grave.

"It is just as well we were on *parole* at first," said Lance; "this is about as unpleasant an abode as one could imagine."

"Day and night in the dark, I expect," said Harold, "for there is no aperture but the door."

"Let us feel for a seat," said Lance. And the next moment uttered an exclamation of "Ugh! I put my hand down on a toad."

"There must be many here, and snakes also, perhaps," said Harold.

"I don't know about that," returned his friend; "I am altogether ignorant of Sicilian reptiles, but I think we had better stand up till Giovanni delivers us."

Harold suggested that Lance should beguile the time with a "yarn;" and the lad was quite ready to "spin" one.

"I read a capital one in a French book the other day," he said; "a book called 'La Peau du Tigre.' It was of two Frenchmen who went out to shoot antelopes in Africa. Well, they killed a big one, and one of the fellows hoisted its fore-legs over his shoulders and carried it on his back. Soon after, with a terrific roar, a huge lion sprang out at them. One ran away, but, glancing back, saw his friend on the earth and the lion on him. He fled with great swiftness to get aid, and returned with a large party, well armed, of French and natives. The lion was still at his feast. They shot him, and then hastened to raise, as they thought and as it looked, the mangled body of their friend. Behold! when raised up, he was alive and all right: he had fallen on his face, and the lion had feasted on the body of the antelope."

Harold laughed.

"A very good story," he said; "and possible, though not probable. That book is worth reading."

"Now it is your turn," said Lance.

"What shall I tell you?" asked Harold. "Oh! I think I remember an instance of a fellow in our own family being frightened half his life about nothing. Our housekeeper told it to me. There is a superstition at the Raven's Nest, that whenever any one there is to die, a little—very small—old woman in black is seen going into

their bed-room. Well, my Uncle George, when he was a young man, and just about to embark with his regiment for India, on going up to dress for dinner one evening, saw a very little woman in black in the corridor leading to his room. She went straight into it! He was fairly startled, but he followed her in. Behold! there was no one. There was a fire sparkling on the hearth, and two candles lighted on the dressing-table, so he could see all over the room, in which stood a fine old four-post bed.

"Though he believed that he had seen the family ghost, he went up one side of the bed and looked under it, but found no one, nor was there any one in the closet; so he was convinced that the little old woman had vanished, and that she had come to warn him of speedy death. Of course he was a good deal cast down; but he did not tell his mother or father or Uncle Jasper, his eldest brother and he sailed with a heavy heart. However, no shipwreck happened as he had expected, and though he was in several battles, and distinguished himself, he lived on, till, when he was about thirty-five, he came home again.

"There was quite a houseful of guests then at the Raven's Nest, amongst them the rector and his daughter, a very handsome young woman of twenty-five or six. After dinner my grandfather said something about the gratitude they ought to feel that, after passing through so many dangers, George had returned safely. He laughed and said yes, that he had proved the family ghost to be an impostor, though she had given him a great fright, and for some years he had daily expected death. His mother, of course, asked what he meant, and he related how he had seen the little old woman. Then Miss Grey, the rector's daughter, exclaimed,

"'Oh, I am *so* sorry! It was I! I had dressed up in the housekeeper's bonnet and cloak, and was walking in the corridor playing 'ghost,' when I heard somebody open the door at the end of it, and I ran away and hid behind the window-curtains in one of the bed-rooms. I peeped, and saw Mr. George come in and go to look under the bed, and whilst he did so I ran out of the room as fast as I could. I am so sorry to have made such a painful impression on you; but I was only ten years old, you know, and never thought of your being deceived by me.'

"Well, there was a great laugh at my uncle, and in the end he married the ghost."

Lance, as in duty bound, found this a capital story, and they went on with alternate yarns till they were rather tired; when, in the middle of a "dreadful murder" related by Harold, Lance exclaimed,

"Hist! I hear a noise!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"WE THREE" ONCE MORE.

HE was right: it was a noise, and a frightful one—a deep distant groan! A few moments' silence followed, and then they heard the key, which shot a host of bolts in their iron door, grate in the wards, and they saw Giovanni, a lantern in his hand, standing before them.

"Come," he whispered; and they followed him swiftly and silently down the rocky passage, and soon stood in the soft clear starlight; but both shuddered as they had to step over the body of Pietro, who lay wounded and bleeding in their path. Giovanni led with a swiftness which tried their speed down the side of the mountain, and about fifty yards below they found Teresa, bearing little Algy fast asleep in her arms. She turned with them, and accompanied them with equal swiftness down the winding mountain path. As if by a common instinct, no one spoke. Harold's artist-eye noticed the solemn beauty of the scene partially revealed by the clear starlight,—the sombre shadows of the projections from the mountain, the gloom of the heavy cypresses, the solemn stillness, over the whole scene, the shadowy distance, and the gleam of the occasional fireflies as they darted by. The silence was profound; there was nothing audible

but the soft breeze sighing through the trees, or far off the cry of a night-bird.

They had proceeded a good way down the mountain-side, when this quiet was suddenly broken by distant shouts and the discharge of a gun. Then Giovanni spoke.

"*Per Bacco!*" he said savagely, "we are pursued. This comes from your folly, signori, in taking back your *parole*. The captain's suspicion was roused at once: he has gone to the garrison cells and found Pietro."

"But we are in advance: can we not even now escape?" asked Lance.

"They will cut us off by some by-path," said Giovanni sullenly. "We had best scatter, so that some at least may escape."

"Give me the child, Teresa," said Harold, holding out his arms. She obeyed him at once.

"It is best so for the poor lamb," she said, giving the child a passionate kiss. "God bless him and you, you brave boy!"

"Pursue this path," said the bandit, "till it divides; then take the downward one. I and Teresa will try to reach the soldiers who have been on the mountains the last two days. *Addio!*"

And he and Teresa, the latter waving an adieu, disappeared in the thick brushwood of the descent.

"Follow them, Lance," said Harold.

"Not I!" replied the midshipman: "I shall stay with you, and help carry that poor little beggar. If he were not so dead sleepy, he might ride on your shoulder."

"I think Teresa has given him poppy-juice, he is so soundly asleep," said Harold.

As they talked, they went on at their quickest pace, and reached the point where the path divided uninter-

rupted; but here they heard voices not far off, and almost ran, in their eagerness, down the precipitous path. But the spot where the path branched off was more open than the sheltered way they had come. Unluckily for them, also, the night was sufficiently light with the moon for them to be perceived, and from the ridge above the bandits had seen them. The fact was proclaimed by a shout which rent the air, and the captain and one of the gang started instantly in pursuit of the fugitives. The boys, flying with a swiftness which rendered them nearly breathless, kept on their course.

"If we could only find an opening to turn down!" gasped Lance.

But the narrow path they were running in wound round the mountain at the edge of a deep precipice, and on the other side huge boulders of rock rose to the height of twenty or thirty feet above them, and were too steep to attempt to climb with the child in their arms. Moreover there was really no foothold on them. The runners could scarcely run abreast, so narrow was the path; they therefore presented a target easy to hit to the pursuers had they chosen to fire. But to kill their prisoners would be a pecuniary sacrifice on their part, and while there existed a chance of capturing them, the brigands would jealously guard their lives. Harold, well aware, however, of the captain's fell designs against the little heir, managed to bend the head of the sleeping child down on his breast, and thus sheltered him with his own body; but the weight of the boy began to tell on him.

"Fly, Lance," he gasped, "fly! I cannot hold out much longer."

"No, no; give me the boy." And standing on the

THE ESCAPE FROM THE BANDITS.

verge of the precipice, the young sailor steadily lifted Algy into his own arms. But even that momentary pause gave an advantage to the pursuers. They gained on the boys; escape seemed impossible, for there still stretched before them that weary length of rocky path between the boulders and the precipice. The captain was now very near them; he roared ferociously,

"You young villains! I will cut off your ears and the tip of your noses; stop this instant!" and a volley of oaths followed.

At that moment there was the report of a gun; the bandit uttered a wild cry, flung up his arms, and fell over the precipice. The fellow running behind him paused evidently fearing an ambush, and ran swiftly back, while there issued from under the great boulders—by a slight projection only of which he had been concealed—a most singular figure: a peasant boy of Sicily by his dress, but armed with a rifle and a belt full of pistols and daggers. He satisfied them, however, as to his nationality by crying, as he watched the flying brigand,

"Dick to the rescue!"

"DICK!!" cried his astonished friends.

"Ay, it's I; but come along, we have no time to talk." And he led the way rapidly along the same path till they perceived a short road running up the mountain, so narrow as to allow only of one person walking on it, cut out of the solid rock.

The boys followed Dick up it, and after half an hour's walk by winding ways, found themselves in front of a wall of stone, covered with ivy and creeping plants, which barred the way; but Dick speedily removed the veil of vegetation, and showed them the entrance to a cavern. It (the entrance) was extremely narrow, and only about

six feet high. They entered, and found themselves in a small cave; or it might be the outer cave of others, for there were several small apertures at the back of it. That it was used for purposes of storage by the brigands was manifest, for a cask stood on its end near the back aperture.

The boys glanced wonderingly round them.

"A regular fortress, isn't it?" said Dick, re-loading his rifle. "Men can only come up that path single file, and we could clear them off—easy. In this place, we three are a match for the whole band."

"As long as our ammunition lasts," said Lance.

"But we've heaps and heaps; that cask's full of powder," replied Dick. "I opened it this morning and saw it was. But, I say, why don't you sit down and rest? You seem sadly out of condition to be so blown," pityingly.

"Of course we are," said Lance. "And Harold has had a heavy child to carry."

"Well, put your jacket on the cask and lay the kid on it, and you two sit down and rest. I'll keep watch at the door."

Lance obeyed the injunction, and put Algy, still sleeping, on the gunpowder-cask. He was safe enough, but Harold, imaginative as he was, did not like the idea of so perilous a couch, and transferred the little fellow to the floor of the cave, seating himself by him, and putting the little head tenderly on his own knees.

"But, Dick," asked Lance, also flung on the floor at his full length, "how came you to arrive so in the nick of time?"

"Well," replied Dick, "I have been on the mountain these last three days searching for you: I was determined

I'd find you and help you if I could, so I got these clothes—I say, ain't I picturesque, Harold?—and learned up about half a dozen Sicilian sentences, as 'Give me a little bread,' 'For charity a little water,' 'Tell me how to take these arms' (they were packed in a small case) 'to the gentlemen of the mountains,' with 'Thank you,' and 'The saints reward you as you deserve,' which has a double meaning, you see. Well, with this vocabulary I started, and found it quite easy to get here, Nature having provided me with an Italian countenance, you see—black eyes, etc., etc. Well, the peasants who live on the mountains, the charcoal-burners, bee-keepers, and goat-herds, were awfully civil when they knew where I wanted to go, thinking 'the gentlemen' meant the bandits, and so I crept upwards. When I reached the point where I had learned the first sentinels were—the outlying piquet, you know—I turned short off, and climbed up till I gained a point a little way from here, and yesterday morning I found this cave. I hid till to-night in it, and came out exploring about midnight. I was going back, when I heard shouts and cries, and I hid behind the projection of the rock, as you know, and relieved you of the nearest and following bandit. By the way, I think the fellow I hit won't survive that tumble over the precipice. Should you think he will?"

"I fancy you shot him through the heart, Dick," said Lance, "for he threw up his arms before he rolled over. But how good you have been to us! What risks you have run to save our lives; and you *have* saved them!"

"Or your ears," laughed Dick, "or noses. I heard what that rascal said, and that made me fire at once. At any rate, I've saved your beauty. How soundly that brat does sleep!"

"Yes, he must have been drugged," said Lance.

"Lucky for you, or he would have cried out."

"No, I think not," said Harold; "he is a plucky little fellow, and would not be afraid with us."

"By-the-bye, how did you come on the precipice pathway?" asked Dick; and Harold in his turn told of their escape.

"I hope Giovanni will reach the soldiers," said Dick, "I know they have been sent out. We have plenty of ammunition, you see, but no provisions. Luckily there is a spring in the inner cavern."

"I have some bread in my pocket which I purloined at supper," said Lance; "I always look out for the commissariat."

Meantime the bandit who had fled had reached his comrades and told them an alarming tale: how there was an ambush of troops on the path by the precipice, and how they had shot the captain and pelted him with balls, but that he had escaped by the aid of St. Rosalia, to whom he vowed a taper. The brigands are, as a rule, as superstitious as they are ferocious, and to them religion is a feeling, a sentiment, something to trust in—but never, as its name means, a restraint.

There was a consultation as to what was to be done. If the precipice path was lined with soldiers, it was far too perilous to traverse; besides, the captain must be rescued, if rescue were possible, but that could wait, since Giacomo declared that their leader had been killed. They finally decided to take a roundabout path to the other end of the precipice path, and reconnoitre for the enemy, into whose hands they believed their prisoners had fallen. A party set off, therefore, to explore, other spies were told off to proceed above the boulders and

look over on the fatal path, and a few went down to the bottom of the precipice to recover the body of their captain, a descent this of five hundred feet! And thus day dawned upon the mountains, and the boys were still safe in their cave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE CAVES.

AS the long lines of light stole between the ivy and creeper leaves into their cave, little Algy woke and stared round him with childish wonder.

"Oh, Halald! where *is* we?" he exclaimed.

"We are hiding in a cave," said Harold. "You like playing hide-and-seek, don't you, Algy?"

"Vely much," cried Algy, clapping his hands. "Who is seeking for us, Halald? Is it Giovanni or Te'sa?"

"It is some unkind men," said his boy guardian; "and you mustn't make a bit of noise, or they will find us."

"Then I won't," said Algy, laying his little finger on his lips, and nodding his head. "But, Halald, I want my b'eakfast."

"We have only a bit of bread," said Lance, drawing it out of his pocket, and dividing it in four portions, one of which he gave to Algy, who began contentedly to eat it.

When their breakfast was over they went separately into the inner cave to drink of the spring, which was very fresh and cold. Harold and Algy went last—Lance had now taken Dick's place as sentinel — and the child laughed gleefully when Harold showed him how to catch the water in the hollow of his hand, and drink; it was

great fun to Algy. But the next moment Dick's head appeared at the aperture, and he said laconically,

"They're coming."

Harold took Algy's hand.

"Algy," he said, "I am going to fight the naughty men. You stay here, and if I don't come back soon, try to find a way out there," pointing to the back of the cave, which seemed full of apertures. "But I will soon be back, dear. You will mind me, won't you, Algy?"

"Es," said Algy, stoutly; "I'll wait, and if you don't tum I'll lun away."

The *r* was Algy's great difficulty.

Harold, thus assured, joined his friends at the mouth of the cavern. One of the bandits was ascending the ridge, trailing his rifle. As he drew the vegetation aside and found himself confronted by the boys, he drew back and let it fall again; but Lance, levelling as low as possible, instantly fired, and the man fell with a cry.

"Shall we go out and help him?" asked Harold eagerly: "he is quite alone."

"We dare not; there may be a lot of fellows behind him," said Lance.

"Well, I'll risk it," said Dick: "I don't half like killing and wounding people. I was being brought up to cure them instead, once upon a time." And he boldly issued from the cave and approached the fallen man.

"Where are you hurt?" he asked, bending over him.

The fellow flashed up a knife at him, and Dick barely avoided its stab.

"Oh!" he said, "if that's your game you may lie there! I came to help you."

The brigand looked curiously at him.

"You do not speak as a Sicilian does," he said, "but

you may be honest: for the sake of St. Rosalia help me!" And he groaned deeply.

Dick turned back.

"Throw away your knife," he said, "if you want me to help you."

The bandit obeyed.

"Now swear by St. Rosalia that you have no other weapon," commanded Dick.

"I swear by Santa Rosalia that I have not. My rifle lies yonder," was the assurance he received.

"Where are you hurt?" asked Dick again, approaching him.

"My ankle is smashed," said the brigand.

Dick proceeded then to examine the man's wounded ankle. It was badly hurt. He called to Harold to give him a wet handkerchief, joined his own to it, and really with some skill bound up the wound. Then he took some coarse string from his pocket, and, with Harold's assistance, tied the man's hands together.

"Now," he said, "lie there till some one comes for you."

The man was in great pain.

"*Vedete, signore*," he said, "I may lie here and die unless help comes. I see you are a friend of the prisoners. Well, I will tell you how to escape from here if you will promise to send some one to my assistance."

"I will promise," said Dick.

"Then don't attempt to get out by the long pathway; there are sentinels at each end: you can never leave it. Go through the back cave, take the first turning to the left (the heart side, remember), then the next to the right, then cross the tree-bridge and go right on; turn to the left again, and you will find an outlet. Once out-

side, go straight down till you see a charcoal-burner's cottage; go to it, and say that Guiseppe sent you, and bid them come here to help me."

"But suppose they made me a prisoner?"

"They will not," declared the man eagerly, "they will not!"

And he looked up with imploring eyes at the boys.

"Well, I'll risk it," said Dick, remembering his disguise; "but if I find you have deceived us about the exit from the cave, I will come back and stab you with your own knife!" picking it up, and the rifle also, as he spoke.

"Can we trust him?" asked Harold as they re-entered the cave.

"I think so: for his own sake he will have spoken the truth. Let us get on, lest his comrades should chance to arrive," said Dick.

They found Algy waiting patiently when they entered the inner cave, and taking his hand, they hurried forward through the furthermost aperture to the left. It was a long passage, very intricate, and evidently winding round the mountain. But they passed on without obstacle till two or three avenues branched off from it. They took the one to the right, and proceeded; but now their progress was difficult. They had been lighted hitherto on their way by fissures in the rock, now they were in utter darkness, and had to feel their way, stumbling often over great pieces of stone and rock. Glancing frequently back, Lance once thought he perceived the flash of a lantern, but the next moment it disappeared. However, by his orders, they flew on as swiftly as possible, and at last issued into a faint daylight, which enabled them to perceive an abyss into which a stream fell with a loud roar—a mountain torrent on its subterraneous way. It

was crossed by the huge trunk of a pine which had been planed flat on the upper side, and was the only bridge. Harold uttered an exclamation of dismay. Lance understood him, and lifted Algy in his arms.

"I will go first with the child," he said, calmly; "my head is firm enough. Then I will return for you and Dick."

And he started on his dangerous way, walking steadily along the shaking, narrow, and perilous bridge. But when he had put Algy down on the other side, and turned to dare the passage again to help his friends, he saw Dick and Harold on it, hand-in-hand, and drew back.

"It is foolish," said Harold, as they came off the bridge, "but ever since Lance picked me off the cliff I have felt giddy when I look down a height. That rushing water made me long to jump over. I think I should have done so if Dick had not held my hand, and made me shut my eyes."

"We are well over," said Dick.

"Now, boys, what do you think we had better do? *I* say, push that bridge off at this end. If we are pursued, that will check the fellows; and I feel sure if some of the band find that worthy Signor Guiseppe, he will tell him we are trapped in here."

"But how if we find no opening beyond, and have to return?" said Lance. "We could not then cross the stream."

"We *shall* find an opening somewhere," said Dick. "The fellow's directions have proved right so far, and he relies on our sending him help, in case he is *not* found by his comrades."

"Dick is right," said Harold; "but how can we move that huge pine?"

"*We three boys,*" said Dick, with a superb air, "can do it; and yonder lies a lever," pointing to a huge branch of a tree lying near.

"With a will then," said Lance.

And the three boys raised their impromptu lever, and by immense efforts pushed the end of the pine trunk nearer and nearer to the edge of the chasm, till, with a splash, it fell in, and the two boys behind Lance pulled him staggering back, or he would have gone with it. It slipped at once from the other side, and the whole of it was carried away by the torrent.

They then hastened onwards, and had turned a corner which hid them from view, when loud cries proclaimed that they were pursued, and that the pursuers were stopped by finding no bridge, for the fall of the one end had, as we have said, precipitated the whole trunk—not fastened at either side—into the abyss. The boys hurried on their way as fast as the darkness would permit. Feeling the sides of the rock, they at last found an aperture to the right, and turned down it. Once more they perceived a gleam of light, and found that it came from an opening at the top of some steps cut in the rock. They hastened up them, and at last breathed the fresh air and came out into the light of day. The path led down the side of the mountain for some distance, till at last they saw a charcoal-burner's hut, half buried in trees and brushwood. Dick turned off into the wood, gave his rifle to Harold—Lance had that of the wounded brigand—and said,

"Now, if you will wait here, I will go to the hut. If you are alarmed, or I don't come back in half an hour, go on as fast as you can down the mountain; you are close to the village."

"But, Dick, that fellow betrayed us, and sent his comrades after us: having destroyed the bridge alone saved us. Surely you are not bound to risk your freedom for him?" said Harold.

"I promised," replied Dick; "his bad faith wouldn't justify mine. But I shall come back. I've been at that hut before. Good bye!"

And he went off, his hand on the pistol concealed in his ragged jacket.

Dick approached the hut with great caution, hiding behind the trees as he advanced, and thus he fortunately perceived that at its door stood one of the brigands. Dick did not know what to do, but after a moment's hesitation, he thought boldness was the best policy, and he advanced fearlessly to the bandit.

"You are one of the signori of the mountains," he said, coolly; "Guiseppe, your comrade, bids me tell you that he lies wounded on the ledge by the magazine, and will you send help to him?"

The man looked earnestly at him.

"He has had help," he said, curtly. "So you got out of that net of the devil, the gunpowder caves! Well, there's no time to be lost. I hurried on here to tell you, and to help you get off. I'm Giovanni's friend, Beppo. Where are the others?"

Dick saw at once that this was the confederate of whom Giovanni had spoken to Lance: the boys had told him all the circumstances of their escape, and Dick resolved to trust him; but first he asked, "How did you know I had been in the magazine caves?"

"Guiseppe told us he had sent you there. You see, we heard a rifle discharged, and went to see what it meant, but we were a good way below the hill, and did

not get to the place from whence the sound came for nearly three-quarters of an hour or an hour. Then we found Guiseppe wounded outside the magazine. He told us that the prisoners had shot him, but that one of them, a Sicilian peasant lad who was with them, had bound up his wound; that he had sent them into a trap by directing them to the intricate passages of the magazine caves, persuading them to go that way for their own safety and for his sake. 'For,' he said, 'the chicken-hearted lads were sorry for me, I could see; so I bade them go and get aid for me at my father's hut, and thus, too, they would be free themselves. But,' he added, 'I knew they would never get there. They will lose their way in the caves, and are already safe.'

"The band resolved to go and seek the prisoners at once, but I (who am, you know, the friend of the prisoners) thought it possible that Guiseppe had given them faithful directions in order that speedy aid might come to him; so I offered to go to the charcoal-burner's while they searched the caves. They laughed, and said I might go, but that the boys could never get out of the caves before they caught them. However, I came, and it was lucky I did. And now let us get on, for we have no time to spare. When they don't find you in the caves they will come here."

"Let us go, then," said Dick, now confident in the man. And they hurried off to the woods.

"How did you know I was one of the fugitives?" asked Dick, as they went on.

"Why, because you gave Giuseppe's message, and he said a Sicilian boy was with them. But you are not Sicilian, I think, by your talk?"

"No," said Dick, "I'm English."

"I might have known that by your courage," said the bandit.

They now perceived the party waiting under the trees, and were also seen by them. Lance perceiving the bandit, raised his rifle, but Dick shouted out, "Don't fire! All right—a friend!" And then the boys advanced to meet them.

Hurried explanations were given by Dick, and then they turned off, guided through its depths by Beppo, who exclaimed several times at their good fortune in not being pursued. "But," he added, "to be sure the band would have to retrace their way, as they found the bridge destroyed, since there was no other exit;" and thus the lads had gained valuable time—an hour, at least.

"We are getting safer every moment," he said, "for the soldiers were here yesterday, and may be again to-day. But we must get on."

He carried Algy, to enable the boys to go on faster, and the hope of escape grew every moment brighter; but the loquacious Sicilian talked nearly as fast as he walked, and the boys were able now to make out the better part of what he said.

"I gave it up for a lost affair," he said, "when I heard you two signori take back your *parole* at supper. I knew the captain would be on the alert then. But after all, it proved the best thing, for Giovanni could get you out of the prison cells easily, because they were only guarded by one man, while coming out of the large cave many eyes might have seen you, and I shouldn't have been at hand to go to the charcoal-burner's to await you."

"And if Dick hadn't kept his word, even to a traitor, we should not have had your guidance," said Harold, smiling at Dick.

"You Inglesi" (English), said the bandit, "are a curious people. You keep your word, even when it is to your own hindrance."

"But it doesn't seem to have been to our hindrance," laughed Lance. "Long live trust in an Englishman's word, say I!"

"Ay," said Beppo; "if we had not known we could trust you we should not have dared risk betraying the band."

"Won't it be dangerous for you to go into Messina?" asked Dick.

The bandit laughed.

"No," he said; "we have plenty of friends there. I shall go to the house of a friend of ours, and be all right."

By this time they had reached the first village on the ascent, where Beppo appeared to be well known; here he procured a bottle of milk, some bread, and a few figs, while a farmer put to his cart for them—which he sent with a driver of his own—quite readily, though Beppo's profession must have been well known to him. They had a good horse, and drove on rapidly.

"If Riccardo had been alive we should never have got off," said Beppo to Dick; "but, you see, they had no leader, and most likely couldn't agree what to do."

It was past midnight when they reached the suburbs of Messina, and Beppo said they had better wait till morning at the inn of a friend of his, to which the boys were compelled to assent, as he gave for reason that he could not risk passing the fortifications at that hour.

They had a good supper—which they sadly needed—and comfortable beds, all in one room; outside the door of which Paolo slept, for the fact was the bandit, in spite

of his declared trust in the English, had no idea of giving them up without the ransom.

When they awoke, however, they were delighted to see Teresa seated by Algy's bedside. The boys gave her a loud and cordial welcome.

"We are so glad you escaped!" they cried. "Where is Giovanni?"

"He is here; it is his father who keeps this inn," she replied, "and Beppo is gone to bring your friends here to fetch you. Now I will dress this blessed child, who sadly wants his bath. The sweet little pet!" kissing him, "I would have died to save him. I don't think much of shooting a man in the way of business sometimes; it is a disagreeable necessity; but to kill a babe, ah! it would be like seething a kid in its mother's milk."

"Teresa," asked Harold, "had you given him an opiate? He slept like a top through everything."

"Of course I had," was the reply, "*che vuole?* otherwise he would have cried, and so have committed suicide without knowing it."

The boys laughed.

"Yes," she went on, "I gave him some poppy-juice. When you paint me as Proserpina, Signor 'Arold, mind you put poppies in my hair."

Mr. Dunmore received the intelligence of his ward's safety with great pleasure and relief, and was quite willing to fulfil the boys' promises with regard to the ransom. He and Mr. Lovelace soon made their appearance at the inn, accompanied by Beppo, who had now assumed the dress of a Sicilian peasant. Here the boys' story was told, and the bandits and Teresa received their promised reward. With it (they informed Mr. Dunmore) they intended to cross into Calabria, and set up as bee-masters; and as

all three expressed a wish to lead an honest life henceforward, and Mr. Dunmore found, on after inquiry, that these two men had not been guilty of any cruel or atrocious action, he succeeded in procuring their pardon from the Government. They had, in fact, rather joined the banditti from love of excitement and the desire to exercise power over the people than from the motives which generally fill the bands, which are — desire to escape from justice, laziness, or an innate spirit of evil.

The reception the boys met at the hotel was quite enthusiastic. Much excitement had been caused by their disappearance, and their story soon appearing in the local papers, redoubled it. They became quite the heroes of the hour, and everybody wanted to know the brave English boys.

Mr. Lovelace was much gratified by Mr. Dunmore presenting Dick with a splendid watch, in acknowledgment of his bravery. "For," he said, "it was after all Dick who saved them."

"No, no!" laughed Dick, "it was 'we three.'"

And Mr. Dunmore was so amused at Dick's catchword that he had three gold and onyx seals inscribed with the words "We Three," and gave one of them to each of the boys, who henceforth sealed their letters constantly with them, whenever they possessed any sealing-wax; and the motto caused no little perplexity to the receivers who hadn't the key to its meaning. The boys also each received a present of an excellent rifle. But we are forestalling our story a little.

CHAPTER XIX.

LANCE IS SHOT INSTEAD OF DICK.

THE very day of their return to the hotel, Harold communicated to Mr. Dunmore the fact that the visitor to the caves of the mountain (by whose order the captain was to kill the child, and thus rob the brigands of their share of the ransom), was the visitor to the Charing Cross Hotel, in whose bag he had found the papers. Mr. Dunmore was very much startled; he had heard the story of the stranger's interference before from Giovanni and Beppo, who related it as a just palliation of their own treachery; and though greatly puzzled by the tale, he had considered it a mere exaggeration of the woman's; but Harold's recognition of the man made it a very different affair. He looked extremely grave as he listened.

"A secret society!" he said. "Can it be possible? And yet it may be. Giles, if it is Giles, has lived much on the Continent, and he and poor Sir Algernon were friends of the extreme revolutionists. Algernon may have in some way disobeyed them, but I cannot believe that any society would in consequence order the sacrifice of an innocent child. It must have been Giles's own wicked will."

And he turned pale and walked hurriedly up and down the room.

"See," he said to Harold, "to what a wild life brings a man at last: to the worst of crimes. Giles Dunmore was a handsome young fellow, with average abilities, who by industry might have done almost anything. He had a small fortune—unluckily, perhaps, as he was thus enabled to live without a profession—and he passed his youth at the gambling resorts of the Continent, till his money was wholly expended. Then he applied to me for help (he had quarrelled with Algernon), and I allowed him then, and have ever since allowed him, an income sufficient for living on, but not for wasting."

"But, Mr. Dunmore," said Harold, "are you not yourself in danger from him, if he is your heir?"

"He is not the heir of *my* property; that is personal—it does not consist of entailed estates," said Mr. Dunmore. "But Algernon's *are* entailed on the male heirs of the title. After Algy I should come in, as I did for a time after Algy's father, and probably *then* I might have to fear the designs of my wicked kinsman; but my own money is, he knows, willed away from him, and my death—while Algy lives—would only deprive him of his income."

Harold breathed a sigh of relief. It had oppressed him to think that his benefactor's life might be in daily peril.

"Then," he said, "we have double reason to watch over dear little Algy."

Mr. Dunmore extended his hand.

"You are a good lad," he said; "we must indeed watch over him, and certainly leave Sicily. Indeed, I intend him and all of us to go on board the yacht at

once. I have offered to take the Lovelaces on to Calcutta in her. It is as well to put a good part of the world between Algy and the secret society. We shall all embark at once. My only annoyance is that Saunders will not go on with us. He says he never agreed to go to India, and that he finds even the heat of Sicily too much for him. So he leaves at once. I don't care for an Italian valet, therefore I mean to go on without one. The steward can do all I require."

Harold was not sorry to learn that Saunders, whom he had always disliked and distrusted, was to leave. He suspected him of having had something to do with the attack on Mr. Dunmore in the lane, and had always felt a kind of antipathy to him.

That evening the whole party embarked in the *Sea-Gull*, intending to sail the next day or the day after. The *Sea-Gull* was a splendid steamer, strongly built and with a good crew, and they might anticipate a pleasant voyage in her.

Lance had telegraphed to his father, who was on the East India station, the moment he reached Messina, and had also written him a long letter. He was in the act of doing the same to the captain of his own ship, when the *Comus* herself steamed into the harbour. When Lance went on the deck of the *Sea-Gull* with his letter, he heard the news, and ran at once to Mr. Dunmore.

"I must report myself, sir," he said.

"Wait till to-morrow morning," said that gentleman, smiling; "we want to keep you as long as we can."

Lance nodded, and sent his letter instead of going himself.

That afternoon they went on shore for the last time, and at Beatrice's request they had a turn or two—after

dining at the hotel—on the Corso: the Lovelace ladies and Mr. Lovelace in a carriage with little Algy, Mr. Dunmore and the boys on hired horses. Lance was by no means a good rider, and they had a great deal of fun about his vagaries on horseback, when, just as the carriage had drawn up near the band to remain there a few moments, Lance's horse darted forward by the side of it and reared. At the same moment a shot struck him in the leg, and his steed, terrified by the report, darted off at full gallop to his stables, followed at full speed by the Lovelaces' carriage and the riders. Happily Lance, though in great pain, kept his seat, holding on to mane and reins "like grim death," as Dick said. The horse also luckily took the road to his own stables, and by the time the other members of the party arrived there, the men of the stable-yard had lifted Lance from the saddle, and borne him into the livery stable-keeper's house. There he was placed on a bed, and a doctor was sent for at once. He pronounced the wound not dangerous; but the bone of the leg was broken, and had to be set, as well as the ball extracted. Lance could not be moved, but the people of the house were kindly and sympathetic, and he was soon made comfortable, Mr. Dunmore insisting on remaining with him. Before night closed in, however, another nurse appeared—Teresa, who had not yet left Messina. She was full of pity and regret.

"It is Riccardo's doing," she declared: "he was not killed, but dreadfully injured, by his fall over the precipice. He was caught by his clothes and held up by some bushes, or he would have been killed; and the band found him. They are furious, and promised to avenge him: you see, they have lost their share of the

ransoms through the escape of the Signori! so Giovanni and Beppo have hurried away, and I have only stayed here to get a few things together before I follow them. I heard of the captain's escape and the rage of the band from a friend of Beppo's this morning. They have sworn to kill the English boy who hurt the captain, and no doubt that is why the signore has been shot. They have mistaken him for Signor Dick."

"We ought never to have landed again," said Mr. Dunmore; "but who could have apprehended danger on the crowded Corso?"

"Ah, signore, you English never understand our people: an avenger would be safe everywhere here—even on the Corso," declared Teresa.

She was ready to assume the nurse's *rôle* at once, though Mr. Dunmore had serious fears for her safety.

"No, no," she assured him, "she was safe enough; she had taken no vows to the band, and they were just—oh, yes, they were just. This was a *vendetta*."

The next morning Mr. Dunmore went on board the *Comus*, and related to her captain the misforture which had befallen his young officer.

Captain Rivers was very sorry.

"I can't tell you," he said to his visitor, "how glad I was to find that Lance Regan was still alive. He has had a most marvellous escape, but how his father will repay you for his ransom I can't tell—he has very little more than his pay, I know."

"Oh," said Mr. Dunmore, "Lance saved the life of a very rich baby-baronet, my ward, and it is only right that Sir Algernon should pay the ransoms of his two friends and his own."

"That is very considerate of you," said Captain Rivers,

"and I am glad for poor Regan's sake. Lance himself is a noble young fellow, and will distinguish himself if we ever have a war. He bears every way an excellent character, and his father may well be proud of him. I will go at once and see him."

The boys, of course, were urgent in their pleadings to be allowed to go to Lance, but Mr. Dunmore would not permit them to visit the shore again.

As soon as possible the wounded boy was moved on board the *Sea-Gull*, Mr. Dunmore never feeling easy about his safety till he was on board; and he was carried to the boat and the ship in his cot. Once on board, however, his comrades never suffered him to be dull; the only fear was, the doctor said, that they would talk and laugh him into a fever.

Captain Rivers came often to see him, and Mr. Dunmore and he grew great friends.

"It is a shame to keep you in harbour like this," Rivers said one day to Mr. Dunmore. "Take the boy on with you to Calcutta. His father is on the East India station, and will take him on board his ship. We thought he was drowned, you know, and his vacancy has been filled up. I will have him invalided."

And thus it happened that the united *three* sailed together to meet new adventures in each other's company.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LOSS OF THE *SEA-GULL.*

SLOWLY, but surely, Lance grew better, and when they reached Alexandria was able to come up to sit on deck. He had seen Alexandria before, but the others were charmed with their first view of Egypt. Harold recalled memories of old historic days, of Cleopatra, of Pompey slain on the shore; and Dick wondered if they couldn't scale Pompey's Pillar, as some sailors had done once upon a time long ago. But Lance evidently felt that it would be unfair of them to achieve such a feat while *he* had but one leg *usable* (as he said), therefore they gave up the idea.

They passed Port Saïd, and were soon steaming down the Suez Canal, which had little attraction for them, with its dull sandbanks and inland lakes; they were glad when their vessel gained the waters of the Gulf of Suez, and when soon after they passed through the Straits of Jubal into the Red Sea. The passage down it was a pleasant one in spite of the great heat. At Aden they went on shore for a few hours, Beatrice being, however, rather terrified at the mode of her landing, borne in a chair through the surf by natives with black skins and red hair (artificially coloured, she was told); but they enjoyed seeing the many-tinted rocks, and Harold

sketched the great lion-shaped rock of white coral which lies before Aden.

They steamed away into the Indian Ocean, and the ladies remained one evening rather late on deck, delighted to watch the expanse of liquid fire which appeared to surround their vessel, and which flew off in fountains of light from her prow. Mr. Dunmore explained to the boys that this appearance was caused by multitudes of electrical insects—fireflies or glowworms of the sea—which gave this strange light to the ocean as it lay in a dead calm with its glittering surface around them. At last they went below, and Beatrice challenged Harold to a game of chess, while Mrs. Lovelace took up a book.

Beatrice played a very good game of chess, and she was in the act of checking Harold's king when she paused with the queen in her hand, saying,

"Something must be the matter. What a disturbance!"

Indeed, feet trampled over their heads, there was shouting and loud cries of "Hard a-port!" and then, just as Harold said "Shall I run up and see what it is?" a violent shock threw chess-board, men, and Beatrice herself on the floor, while the steamer reeled over greatly on her side.

"A collision!" cried Harold. "Here, put on your wraps and run on deck as quickly as possible."

"And you?" panted Beatrice, rising and taking her jacket and hat from his hands.

"I am going for Algy. Make haste on deck." And he darted off to the cabin where the poor little boy and his nurse, Benedetta, slept.

Happily the nurse was still up and sitting at work. She was a brave woman and did not lose her presence of

mind, but began instantly and hurriedly to dress the child, while Harold hastened on deck.

A fearful scene presented itself to him. The rigging was torn, the side-bulwarks dashed in, everything on deck in disorder except the crew—they were calm and obeying orders, some getting out the boats, others collecting provisions and useful articles. Dick had gone for the boys' and gentlemen's guns and ammunition. All was order and discipline, though the gurgling of water told how the fiery sea was entering by the breach made near the bow-compartment.

"Yes," said Lance, in answer to Harold, "a huge steamer ran into us, though we did our best to get out of her way, the brute!"

"But where is she?" asked Harold.

"There, steaming away as fast as she can. But some of our men climbed on her forecastle, and they will tell the story of her cowardice and cruelty," indignantly.

These words were spoken while side by side the boys lent their aid to the men getting out the boats.

The *Sea-Gull* was strongly built, and it was more than twenty minutes before she showed signs of sinking. By that time the boats were ready and provisioned, for the men worked with a will and in great order. Then Mr. Dunmore's voice was heard.

"The ladies first into the boats. Let me assist you, Mrs. Lovelace."

And soon she, Beatrice, the nurse Benedetta, and the child were seated in the barge, with Captain Elliot as steersman, Mr. Lovelace, Dick, and as many seamen as she would hold.

Mr. Dunmore, Lance, and Harold, with the stewardess, a sailor's wife, and Mrs. Lovelace's maid, were in the

lugger with a full crew; the third and smaller boat, commanded by the first officer, contained the remainder of the crew. In each boat a part of the provisions—*i.e.*, a can of fresh water, a bag of biscuits, and some salt pork—had been placed.

Before embarking Mr. Dunmore and his captain had exchanged a few words as to where they should go.

"We are not very far off Socotra," said the captain, "and may easily reach it with this calm sea and light breeze. We had better try for it."

"You shall lead in the barge, and we will follow you," said Mr. Dunmore.

And then they parted.

The boats shoved off, and were soon at a safe distance from the fast settling ship, which was now leaning over terribly on her side, yet was not on her beam-end. Her stern was high out of the sea, the water being gathered chiefly at the bow.

"Lay to, men," cried Mr. Dunmore, "and let us see the last of the *Sea-Gull*."

The men obeyed, and all gazed at the stricken vessel. Her stern rose still higher; then leaning over, she settled down rapidly: a few minutes, and, with a rush and gurgle of the waters, the gallant steamer sank, and the sparkling fiery sea closed over her.

"Gone!" cried the boys, with an anguish they scarcely understood. "Gone for ever! the dear old *Sea-Gull!*"

And tears stood in their eyes. One gets to love one's ship so well, to take such pride in her, to feel for her almost as for a friend, a sentient being; and the *Sea-Gull* was a fine steamer, swift and beautiful, and had been Harold's pride ever since he went on board her.

Mr. Dunmore sighed deeply.

"Farewell, my bonny *Sea-Gull!*" he said, "and thank Heaven that you were strong enough to give us time to forsake you in your distress. Give way, men, and follow Mr. Elliot's boat; he will lead us to the nearest land."

It was by that time,—Mr. Lovelace said, after looking at his watch,—just half an hour since the collision.

The boats moved on over the sparkling sea, bound, Mr. Dunmore told Harold, for Socotra.

"Did that rascally skipper not even attempt to help us?" asked Harold, who had been in the cabin, as we know, when the collision happened.

"No," said Mr. Dunmore; "but I don't think he quite realized how completely he had smashed us. Still, he ought to have waited to see."

"Our lights were all right," said Harold.

"Yes; it was entirely their fault," replied Mr. Dunmore.

"Is Socotra inhabited?" asked Harold after a pause.

"Yes, by Arabs chiefly, I believe. I recollect an Indian mail steamer was lost on it or near it in eighteen forty-three or four, so it must be in their direct route. Elliot knows all about it."

They pulled steadily on for hours, the gentlemen relieving the men occasionally at the oars, and giving each in turn a rest; but the dawn streaked the east with a long thin line of silver, and still there was no sign of the desired island. However, Mr. Elliot still led, compass in hand, towards the west, and they followed his boat. But they had an opportunity of beholding the superb spectacle of sunrise over the sea before the bow oar in Elliot's boat shouted, "Land ahead!"

The rowers bent to their oars with fresh vigour, and soon a rocky shore appeared to rise out of the sea.

Another hour's pull, and they approached a high and rocky coast, on which they perceived it would be difficult to land, the surf breaking on it with some violence. They had to coast round it a good way before a creek appeared which they could enter. This, however, ran a good way up into the land, and enabled them to bring the boats to a place where they could get on shore by a little wading ; Mr. Dunmore and Mr. Lovelace carrying the ladies, the seamen the women and child. The men rapidly unloaded the boats, which they contrived afterwards to moor on to a sharp point of rock which appeared to lend itself for a holdfast.

It was a strange, picturesque scene. The land sloped abruptly to small sharp rocks and mud, above this it was covered with stunted grass, and shut in by strangely-tinted rocks, resembling those they had seen at Aden. But at one spot grew a cluster of date-palms. The shore was soon covered with the things removed from the boats, which the men stripped of sails, masts, oars, awning, and provisions, bringing everything to the land. Then they contrived to get the boats in as near the shore and safe from the small pointed rocks as possible, for Mr. Dunmore feared that, if the tide rose and there should be a surf here, as at Aden, they might get injured. Elliot, however, said the creek would be free from surf. While the men had been busy, the three lads had lent their best aid to them, taking care especially of the arms and ammunition. At length all paused, wearied by their toil in the now burning sun.

Meantime one of the men had gathered a quantity of dry aloe leaves and prickly pear stems, and made a fire ; the stewardess filled a kettle and put on it, the nurse helping both ; and very soon afterwards the ladies sitting

on the grass were having a cup of tea—the women having secured a canister of it—and eating biscuits with a good appetite.

The boatswain piped all hands to breakfast then, and soon the men were seen cast on the grass in groups, while the steward, by Mr. Dunmore's desire, gave each his ration of biscuit and water—for they might need to be careful of the provisions.

The meal over, the men who had had it under the shelter of the rocks, flung themselves on the turf, and slept, exhausted by heat and toil. The ladies also slept, and the child; but Mr. Dunmore, Mr. Lovelace, and Captain Elliot held counsel as to their position.

"The men must rest for a couple of hours," said Elliot, "then, I think, sir, we had better explore the island, and see if it is inhabited."

"You don't think then that we have reached Socotra?" asked Mr. Lovelace.

"No, I am sure we have not; we should have found inhabitants at once if we had. I suspect this island is one of the small ones due south-west of Socotra, some of which are very sparsely inhabited."

"I am not the least tired," said Mr. Dunmore, "and I expect the boys are not; why should we not explore while the men sleep?"

Mr. Elliot shook his head.

"If the island is inhabited, sir," he said, "it will be by predatory Arabs. A small party might be attacked and murdered. There will be time enough to explore towards evening; meantime I advise you all to rest. I will keep watch."

As all were tired, this advice was accepted; but the gentlemen and boys first managed, with the help of Mr.

Elliot and two of the men, to arrange the two big sails over the oars and masts, which they planted in the sand, so as to make a shelter for the ladies and child from the sun, the rock lending its shadow also at the back of them, and then, stretched as much under its shelter as possible, the shipwrecked people enjoyed a few hours' sleep.

When they awoke they found that Mr. Dunmore had relieved the captain's watch, and was sitting looking out to sea on a small rock near the shore.

"Oh! why did you not wake me to watch for you?" asked Harold, approaching him.

"There was no occasion; but now that all are rested we must arrange watches as on board ship, and all take our turns—except, of course, Mr. Lovelace."

"We shall all be ready to do so," said Dick.

"But our first business now," said Mr. Dunmore, "is to raise a signal in order to bring help from any passing steamer, and to secure ourselves for the night."

They all agreed in the wisdom of this mode of action, and with the skill and ingenuity of seamen two masts were fastened together, and a flag, which lay in the barge, fixed to the top of them. This pole was then planted deeply in a hole in the ground, and secured by ropes. From its summit waved the white flag and cross of St. George; and as the pole was planted on the highest rocks they could find, it must, they thought, be visible for some distance at sea.

While this important work was going on, the boys and Mr. Lovelace had been exploring the semicircle of rocks which shut in the part of the shore on which they had landed, and had found two or three shallow caves, or recesses rather, into which they took the boat cushions and arranged them as pillows. A sail was hung in front

of each, and they were set aside for the ladies and women. The guns were then loaded, and the watches set.

The sun was now low down, and the exploring party resolved to set out at once. It consisted of Mr. Dunmore, Captain Elliot, Harold, Dick, and ten men. Lance, unable yet to walk without a stick, was left to take care of the women and child.

They discovered a narrow opening between the rocks, and defiling through it, found themselves on a plain shut in by hills. One of these they resolved to climb, and on attaining its summit they looked down on a wide-spreading plain, dotted over with fig and date-trees, and a few other palms. A stream ran through it, and on its banks an antelope was drinking. Beyond this plain high and arid rocks once more shut in the view.

"Here are water and animals fit for food," said Mr. Dunmore. "I expect there are, therefore, inhabitants on the island."

"Yes," said Harold eagerly. "Look! there is a herd of antelopes under those trees. Dick, let us have a shot at them!" And he set off at full speed down the hill, Dick following him.

"But," said Dick, as they reached the plain, "we must act as Robinson Crusoe did with the goats: we must get our game beneath us. Let us go up that hill which hangs just over them, and fire down from it."

This plan was carefully pursued. They crept noiselessly along the turf, and as the wind was in their faces, gained the point they desired unperceived by the antelopes. Both fired, and one of the animals fell, while the frightened herd fled with the speed of the wind. The boys soon ran down the hill, and dragged their game with a glad shout to the spot in the valley which their friends had by then reached.

The seamen at once relieved them of their deer, and then Mr. Dunmore proposed returning to the shore party

"We have evidently no very near neighbours," he said, "far away I think I can distinguish a trace of smoke on the air, but we need have no fear of any immediate attack from unfriendly Arabs. We had better go back now; you boys have provided a good supper for us all."

And, indeed, a shout of triumph from the hungry seamen greeted the appearance of the antelope. They had soon surrounded it: the ship's butcher skinned and cut it up, and portions were distributed after a few slices, toasted by the fire on knives, had been taken to the ladies. Dick had also brought them a few bananas from a banana-tree they had passed, so, with a little wine and biscuit added to it, they had a really good supper.

The men kindled several other fires, and cooked their own portions, so that nothing eatable remained of the antelope by the time the whole party had supped, and the men stretched the skin out afterwards on a rock to dry.

Before setting the night watches, Mr. Dunmore addressed his crew, standing, that he might be the better heard, on one of the smaller rocks. He reminded them how mercifully Divine Providence had preserved them from sinking in the *Sea-Gull*, and brought them safely to land, and he said he thought they all ought to kneel and acknowledge God's goodness to them before they again slept. A low and not irreverent cheer answered him, and when he called out in a clear voice, "Let us pray," the whole party fell on their knees and joined in devout thanksgiving. Then the watches were set, the women retired into their shallow bed-places, and the great shining moon rose again over the Indian Ocean.

CHAPTER XXI.

SHIPWRECKED.

DAY dawned in all its loveliness the next morning, and the shipwrecked people—who had rested well for two or three hours the previous day—rose with the light, and were soon busied in making matters, as they termed it, shipshape.

Breakfast was served out to the men, and by that time the ladies and child appeared—the women attendants had been as early risers as the sailors. It was a busy pleasant scene: the men moving about, the brilliant dancing sea, the little child jumping and shouting, delighted at being once more on shore.

When they had all breakfasted Mr. Dunmore proposed another exploring expedition; Mr. Lovelace and Captain Elliot to accompany him, the boys and the first officer to remain with the ladies.

The boys would rather have gone also, but they knew that it was no use to dispute or try and contravene any of the orders given by Mr. Dunmore; they consoled themselves, therefore, by begging two or three hair-pins from Beatrice's plaits, and manufacturing with them and their own string a hook and line for catching fish. The shore bestowed a few worms in return for their careful search, and they paddled out as far as they dared, and,

seating themselves on a rock, succeeded in catching several fish unknown to them, but which one of the seamen told them were called (in Bombay) pomfrets. The sailors who were not in the watch followed their example, except two, who, assisted by the stewardess, were busy collecting dry wood beyond the rocks for the fires, on which the fish were to be cooked.

And then Beatrice began to show that though her knowledge of history was defective, she was clever at other things. She encouraged the poor nurse, who was much cast down, and did not know how to manage about washing the boy, showing her a pool of salt water behind the rocks in which he might be dipped (and which had served for a washing-basin for herself and mother first), and helped her afterwards to amuse little Algy.

Her care and attention to her mother were unceasing, and sometimes she ran out to the boys with bare feet in the sea pools, to see how they got on, and to admire the success of their efforts.

By-and-bye the boatswain piped all hands to dinner. It was noon, and the ladies were glad also to partake of the fresh fish, which was served up to them on plantain-leaves with great ceremony by the boys, who offered, in place of knives and forks, their penknives and some two-pronged wooden forks which one of the seamen had ingeniously constructed.

A shot or two from the top of the hills after dinner announced that the watchers there had sighted something edible or inimical; but their fears were soon set at rest by the appearance of a seaman with birds which had been the victims of that gun.

Thus the day passed.

No shadow of sail or steamer appeared upon the hori-

zon, promising deliverance; and in the noontide calm St. George's banner drooped lazily round their flagstaff.

It was nearly six o'clock before the exploring party returned. They were very weary, and were glad to rest on the sand and drink a glass of wine, which was, in return for their toil, vouchsafed to the gentlemen by the careful steward.

"Yes," said Mr. Dunmore, in reply to their eager questions, "the island is inhabited. We found on nearly the opposite shore a settlement,—it can hardly be called a village, it consists only of a few mud huts. They have canoes, and evidently come from the mainland; but as none of us speak Arabic, we could not learn anything definite about them; but we purchased of them some wooden bowls and platters and some coffee-berries: Dick was right yesterday, he said he saw some coffee-trees, but we thought he must have been mistaken. The people were not uncivil, yet they did not look very cordially disposed towards us."

The supply of bowls and platters was very welcome to the shipwrecked people. Mr. Dunmore had also shot and the men had brought in another antelope, and supper was dressed and eaten with greater comfort.

The next day the boys set out at early dawn for the brook, intending to have a good bath in it, sharks forbidding them from trying a swim in the sea; but Mr. Dunmore would not let them go alone: he sent some of the men with them, for he could not be sure that there were no other inhabitants in the island than those they had seen the previous day. The men greatly liked the idea of exploring the inland part of the island, and moreover, hoped to get some more game.

And now Dick's knowledge of botany came into use.

He showed his companions the pepper-plants, the coffee-shrubs, and several edible green vegetables, which they eagerly gathered.

"This," he said, pausing before a great plot of golden grain, "is a species of holcus—the dhurra, the principal grain of Egypt after wheat. I have read of it and seen pictures of it, but have never seen it growing before. It will give us 'soft tack,' as you fellows call it," to the seamen.

They laughed joyfully.

"Them 's useful books as you has read, Mr. Richard," said one of the men; "we will reap this—what do you call it?" pausing.

"Dhurra," said Dick.

"Yes, this durry, pretty soon."

After bathing, gathering some late figs and a few green pods somewhat like beans, they wandered on in a different direction to the one followed by the gentlemen on the previous day, but they found nothing but arid plains and rocks, neither trees nor human habitation, and they came to the conclusion that only the eastern and southern sides of the island could be inhabited.

"We will go south to-morrow," said Harold, "the north is quite uninhabitable."

And to the south they went next day, and found again a fertile valley, plots of grain and groves of palm-trees. Here the boys shot some partridges, which were so tame they ran out before them on the grass; ortolans also evidently abounded, and a few were also secured to carry back with them.

Meantime the men on the shore had not been idle. They had rigged up a small tent with the sails of the boats, which they ingeniously fixed to the date-trees at

the sides by tying the oars to the trunks of two which stood near each other, and suspending the one lug-sail left, and the sheet of the barge to them, and covering the top with the jib and smaller sails. This was appropriated to the females and child; now the gentlemen could have the caves, and the blue-jackets by infinite labour had cleared out a larger cavity for themselves, as sleeping in the night dews of the East is not esteemed healthy.

But watch was always regularly kept, as the party sent south had fancied they perceived signs of inhabitants there. And they were not mistaken; the south coast *was* inhabited by a colony of Arabs from the mainland.

CHAPTER XXII.

SAMBO.

THE seamen went out the next day and returned laden with the dhurra grain, which they had reaped with their knives. They intended to prepare it with their hands instead of winnowing, and then to grind it with a heavy stone on the rocks, to make cakes; but they had been seen by the Arab inhabitants, and about two hours afterwards, while they were rubbing off the husks from the grain, the party were startled by the appearance of four or five Arabs, wild, ferocious-looking men, armed with spears. They were followed by a negro—evidently a slave.

They made *salaams* to the gentlemen, and the leader of the group addressed them in Arabic; but on Mr. Dunmore making signs that he did not understand them, the Arab beckoned the negro to come forward and speak. Grinning and showing all his teeth, the latter, with an air of importance, said,

"Massa, me speaky Inglis. My massa big sheik—this land his land—deer his deer—dhurra his dhurra. If white man take it, white man must give backshish."

"Very clear indeed," said Mr. Dunmore, smiling good-naturedly at the sable interpreter, "and we *will* give 'backshish,' tell the chief."

The words were repeated to the sheik, who gave a grim smile, and again spoke to his interpreter.

"Sheik say, Englisman must give up all the money him hab at once to the sheik."

"Tell him," said Mr. Dunmore, "that we will give him what little money we have for what we have eaten; but that if he can help us to get to Socotra, we shall be able to get much money there, and then he shall have more."

The sable interpreter repeated these words, and then translated the reply.

"Sheik say give money at once, then him see."

Aware of the desperate character of the Arabs on the islands, Mr. Dunmore coolly took out his purse and emptied its contents. The sheik's eyes glistened at the sight of the gold.

"Tell him," said Mr. Dunmore, "that I will give him much more if he will let one of his men pilot us to Socotra—if they can."

"Oh, yes, massa *can*," said the negro; "but you take cares."

And he repeated Mr. Dunmore's words to the sheik.

"Sheik want men's clothes and guns, then he take men on to Socotra," said the negro, when the answer had come.

"Tell him," said Mr. Dunmore, "that we will give him no more till we are safe at Socotra. We have arms and will fight."

The negro with many gesticulations of alarm repeated these words to the sheik. He frowned and consulted his followers, the negro intervening occasionally with eager words. At length he said to Mr. Dunmore.

"Sheik say will send men to guide boats to Socotra; but massa take care and watch to-night."

"Thanks," said Mr. Dunmore, gravely. "Tell the chief that if he will let his people pilot us to Socotra, we will send back gold and our largest boat for himself."

The sheik's face visibly brightened at these words: he had only canoes, and the big boat yonder was offered! The negro said something more, and the sheik smiled and nodded. The negro spoke again to Mr. Dunmore.

"Massa," he said, "I tell sheik Englishman always keep his word. He say, show him boat."

Then the Arabs were led to where the boats had been drawn up.

Meantime, the men, summoned and drilled, so to speak, by Lance, had gathered into a strong body, with clubs, oars, and knives open; and Lance, Harold, Dick, Captain Elliot, and Mr. Lovelace had taken their rifles. The sheik was charmed with the boat, though he concealed his delight with the cunning of a savage; and when he turned back and beheld the assembled seamen ready for fight, he decided, and spoke to the negro again.

"Sheik say," interpreted the latter, "that is satisfied with boat and massa's promise, and will lend men to go with them. I can be pilot," added the negro proudly; "but massa keep good watch to-night."

He ran these words on to those he translated, pointing to the sheik as if threatening them with his power.

Mr. Dunmore understood, nodded, and then desired him to tell the sheik that they would be good friends to him hereafter, and send him gifts.

The sheik then salaamed, and the party retired.

"A friendly negro," said Mr. Dunmore. "We must act on his hint. I suspect if all the tribe were at home we should have had a hard time with them. These are in-

ferior tribes, lacking the hospitality and good faith of the better part of their nation."

As may be imagined, the crew and their officers took care to watch that night; and it was well they did so; as Dick, from a pinnacle of the rock which he had attained, perceived quite a body of Arabs moving about at no great distance. But the men purposely kept up a loud noise, shouting and singing by order of Captain Elliot; and as they were numerous, and all armed in one way or the other—with oars, cudgels cut from the fig-trees, or with rifles—the courage of the treacherous Arabs failed, and no attack was made.

At dawn the men were busy at the boats—shipping masts, getting the sails set, and putting their remaining provisions on board.

The delight of the women at the thought of getting better shelter, and their ordinary comforts again, was extreme; but Beatrice gathered a few leaves of the palm-trees to keep in memory of their shipwreck.

By sunrise three Arabs and the negro issued from the passage through the rocks, ready to fulfil the terms of their compact.

They were soon all ready to embark. The negro was put in Mr. Dunmore's boat, the Arabs were divided between the barge and the smaller boat.

They had scarcely pushed off before the negro burst forth into a

"Golly! we very lucky, sar. Arabs great thieves. If you been few poor sailors they strip you and leave you on shore, or else take you to mainland and sell you for slave. Ah! very lucky sheik nebber see the missee."

Beatrice's mother had kept her in the tent while the Arabs were on the beach.

"He never mean to let massa go at first; but I persuade him. I say, 'Englishman alway keep word—he will send money. If the sheik kill Englishman, then big ship come and kill ebberybody.' Then he say, 'Let them go; but if you don't bring back much backshish, then I skin you alive.'"

Mr. Dunmore thanked the negro, and gave him the single gold coin he had left, and the black was very thankful; but by-and-bye said,

"We stand out to sea, sar, more; many rocks here. Ships pass there; better stand out to sea."

They complied with his desire, and had soon cause to rejoice that they had done so, for very soon afterwards they beheld steaming towards them a noble vessel, with the Union Jack blowing out at her masthead, and Lance cried out,

"The Indian Mail steamer! The Indian Mail!"

In a moment the people in the boats made all sorts of efforts to attract her attention. They shouted "Steamer ahoy!" they waved their handkerchiefs; they steered up towards her; and with thankful hearts at last perceived that they were seen. She slackened way, and a boat was put off to them, which met them in their approach to her.

"The crew and passengers of the lost yacht!" cried the first officer of the mail steamer, who was in the boat. "Come on at once. Happily we are not very full of passengers this trip. Let us make haste to get the ladies on board."

It is scarcely necessary to say that the shipwrecked people received a cordial and courteous welcome from the captain of the *Kaiser-i-Hind.*

The Arabs were meantime inclined to murmur, fearing

that their promised reward would be lost; but Mr. Lovelace, before they left the boats, paid them the sum promised, and bestowed the largest of the three boats upon them for their return. They still, however, lay alongside the steamer, uttering shrill cries and demands, till the seamen on board the ship grew impatient, cast off their painter, and the steamer moved on.

Then the boys perceived the meaning of the Arabs' cries: the negro was not in the boat! He must have gone below, or fallen overboard! They communicated their discovery to one of the seamen, who replied,

"Never mind; the poor fellow is hiding maybe on board. He knows well that whoever is under the British flag is free. No slave can tread our quarter-deck!"

The boys said no more; and the seaman's explanation proved correct, as in about a couple of hours' time Sambo appeared on deck, grinning from ear to ear, and saying to the boys,

"I se gent'lman—Sambo free now—Sambo nebber go back to Arabs any more!"

The captain, when he first heard of this stowaway, was inclined to be vexed—a good deal had been recently said about the reception of runaway slaves on board English ships, and he thought he might be called to account for it by the Peninsular and Oriental Company; but Mr. Dunmore assured him that no possible blame could be attached to him.

"In fact," he added, "the nation would defend you, even if you had knowingly received the poor fellow, for public feeling will not bear any tampering with human freedom when known."

In the twilight the negro came as far aft as he dared, to speak again to the boys.

"I thought," he said, "massa let me stay, 'cos I warned him of thievy Arab, and 'cos Englishman like to free slave."

"Yes, and we were much obliged to you, Sambo," said Harold. "But how came you to be a slave? I thought there were not any now."

"Ah, massa not know! Plenty slaves in Africa nobody knows 'bout. Arabs steal me from my home, sell me, send me in ship. I sail away from home, but English ship take slave-dhow. Then I stay in English ship very long time, and learn English talkee bymby; try to get back to my people, but Arabs catchee me once more, keep me then, but here I are now!" and he extended his hands with an imposing air. The boys laughed heartily. They were very glad of Sambo's escape, and Dick went to his uncle and asked good-natured Mr. Lovelace to take the negro into his service. The merchant assented, though he really did not see of what use the black could be to him. That kind action, however, was destined to bring him a great reward.

Sambo was engaged as what was called in old times "body servant;" valet would really be too grand a name for him; and the whole family soon found him useful. He never failed to see to all their wants, and was ingenious in devising little comforts and luxuries. Mrs. Lovelace, who had been much exhausted by "roughing it" on the Arab island for three or four days, never found Sambo weary of fanning her, or without a delicious cool drink when she needed one. Mr. Lovelace procured for him from the purser a white jacket and trousers, and Sambo was now in his glory, especially as Mr. Dick gave him his bright blue tie, which was a little stained with sea-water, but still fine.

The voyage across the Indian Ocean was delightful. The steamer touched first at Bombay, so after a rapid passage they entered the most beautiful harbour in the world, except that of Naples. Here the shipwrecked passengers went on shore. The steamer would proceed at once to Calcutta, but the rescued people were all so destitute of clothing that they were compelled to remain at Bombay to replenish their wardrobes; also Mr. Dunmore did not wish to pay the passage of his crew there and back; he preferred sending them to England from Bombay. He had a long discussion with Captain Elliot, and it ended in his commissioning that officer to purchase another yacht for him in England, and to re-ship the same crew in it, who, meantime, were to be sent home; to have leave on shore in England with half-pay, till the new yacht should be ready. For," said the generous yacht owner, "they must not suffer from our shipwreck. I have promised to take Mr. Lance Regan to Calcutta to meet his father. You must, therefore, Mr. Elliot, come there for us when you have secured a vessel."

When Mr. Lovelace heard of this arrangement, he invited Mr. Dunmore to go on with them to Assam.

"You are not tied to time," he said: "and you will have to wait for your yacht at Calcutta. Now, I think you would find our Assam climate delightfully salubrious for Algy, and we can give you some good tiger-shooting in the European and Assam fashion, if you like. It will make us so happy if you will go."

Mr. Dunmore laughed. "I shall be only too glad," he said; "for, to tell you the truth, I was rather puzzled about staying in Calcutta with Algy, and should have to go the hills certainly, on his account, if I did. Therefore I accept your invitation with gratitude."

They did all their business in Bombay, getting everything they actually required, though Beatrice mourned for her Paris dresses. As soon as the news of their adventures reached the Governor's ears he sent an aide-de-camp to Mr. Dunmore (who was an old personal friend of his own) to invite the whole party to stay at Parell, the Government House. The invitation was accepted, and they were soon installed in that delightful dwelling.

Here, for the first time, Dick, Harold, and Lance saw what Anglo-Indian life is in its best form. The magnificent rooms; the state and form of living; the Italian garden, with its fountain between the two singing trees of the "Arabian Nights," the great lily-bell creeper festooned over it, receiving the spray of the fountain, and sending it back in drops of glittering crystal, charmed them. They were waited on by Parsees too, the ancient Guebres or Fire-Worshippers, which delighted Harold, who had read and dearly loved "Lalla Rookh."

There was a tame cheetah in the grounds; its den was railed off from the garden; and this was an object of great interest to the boys. They and Beatrice delighted to feed it and pet it. One day, however, Beatrice was stroking it with her gloved hand, when it suddenly licked it, and stripped the glove clean off. On hearing this, orders were issued by the Governor that the leopard should not be touched by any one again, as, he assured Beatrice, if the animal had licked her ungloved hand, he would, with his rough tongue, have licked off *the skin* as he had the kid, and finding that the hand was good to eat, would probably have bitten it off.

Before they left Bombay they had many early morning rides through the cocoanut groves, and drove to Malabar Point, where the Guebre or Parsee death-towers are. On

a latticework cover at the top of these towers the bodies of the Parsees are laid to be devoured by vultures, which of course abound round them. Disgusting birds they are; they made even the boys shudder as they swooped down round their carriage.

They visited also the caves of Salsette and Elephanta, with which they were greatly delighted, and it was with regret that they said farewell at last to their hospitable host and his family of lovely daughters, to embark in the steamer for Calcutta.

Lance, however, had the pleasant hope of meeting his father there.

"But I hope the *Conqueror* won't be at Calcutta," said Harold, "then we three shall go up to Assam and have a tiger-hunt together, and perhaps shoot a panther or two. It won't be half the fun if *you* are not with us, Lance."

"Oh, he will be," said Dick, "I have read it in the stars. I say, Harold, what a size the planets are here! They look like billiard-balls."

On their arrival at Calcutta Dick proved to be so good a prophet that he insisted on being called the "Astrologer," for Captain Regan's ship was not there, and was not expected for a month at least, they learned.

Then Mr. Lovelace declared that Lance should not be put on board another ship till he could join his father; he should go on to Assam with them, and he (Mr. Lovelace) would leave instructions with his agent to telegraph to them when the *Conqueror* should arrive, and then Lance could hurry off to join her.

And thus it chanced that the three boys were associated again in fresh adventures in the far East.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AMONGST THE TEA.

THE travellers did not make a long stay at Calcutta, remaining there only a sufficient time to supplement any wants left unsupplied at Bombay, and for Mr. Lovelace to see his agents and correspondents. Then embarking in a steamer once more, they voyaged up the mighty River Brahmaputra, which runs through the heart of Assam and is its finest highway.

The scenery on either side of it was new to the boys, and very beautiful. The broad margins of tall grasses and high weeds on each side were skirted by cultivated lands (very prosperous-looking), paddy or rice-fields, villages embosomed in fruit-trees, and wide tracts of cultivation, the level lands gradually ending in thick forests, above which rose the sun-tinted hills.

There were numerous small islands on the river, and one very large one, on which the boys beheld for the first time, to their infinite delight, a wild elephant standing by the river's brink. Lance called to Harold and Dick to look at it.

"It just completes the picture," said Harold.

"Might we have a shot at it?" asked Dick.

"I don't think we may," said Lance; "I fancy that I

have heard there are game laws in India with respect to elephants—are there not, sir?" to Mr. Lovelace, who had approached them.

"Yes. The elephant would have been exterminated but for the law which forbids any one to kill or capture one unless possessed of a licence to do so from Government. To kill an elephant without it is to subject oneself to a fine of five hundred rupees (fifty pounds) for the first offence, and a similar fine and six months' imprisonment for the second."

"Do you think then that by-and-bye there will be no elephants?" asked Beatrice.

"Oh, no, dear. In the great unsurveyed forests between Assam and Burmah elephants are so abundant that it seems scarcely possible even to thin their numbers. A great many are caught yearly and tamed for export; but I have heard that elephant selling is a very precarious business, as the animals frequently die in the process of taming. They are shot also in the forests for their tusks of ivory; but one must have a licence from Government to shoot or catch them unless they endanger life or property."

"Oh, how I should like to have a pet elephant!" cried Beatrice.

"It would be an expensive pet," laughed her father; "the food of an elephant and its mahout would cost a large sum yearly. You must be content to pet a gazelle, Bee, and to ride on a nice little Arab."

"Oh, papa," exclaimed the girl, "shall I have a horse of my own?"

"Yes, and I hope you will like riding on the hills. We must give the boys mounts also—Dick rides pretty well, I know," said Mr. Lovelace.

"But Lance!" cried Beatrice. "Oh, I like to see him on horseback! But sailors never can ride, you know."

"Well," said Lance, flushing a little, "I suppose I can improve as well as other people?"

"We will teach you," cried the two other boys together. "You'll ride it well enough in time."

The journey proved a very pleasant one, and they were almost sorry when it was over and they had reached their destination, which they did just after sunset one evening, with time only to dine and go to bed.

Little Algy had borne the voyage and journey very well; he was growing a sweet little fellow, full of fun and mischief, and was the pet of the whole party. His health had improved daily under the kind motherly superintendence of Mrs. Lovelace, and he loved her and Beatrice as well, but not better than, "brother Harold," as he called him.

Mr. Lovelace's plantation was on the slope of one of the southern hills, on the other side of which dwelt one of the Naga tribes. The land had been originally a Government grant made on very profitable terms; Mr. Lovelace had purchased it from its first owner, and also a good deal of additional ground; and his possessions now consisted of a large extent of tea gardens, running down the hill-side and stretching into the valley beneath. There the lovely tea-shrub grew abundantly, and presented a pretty picture of snowy blossoms and green leaves, lighted up by the brilliant sunlight.

The gardens were watered by little rivulets, or canals, from the affluent which descends the hills at that spot to join and swell the waters of the mighty Brahmaputra.

The house was built on nearly the highest part of the

property, and had orange groves on one side and a grove of bananas on the other. The property was on each side bounded by forests. On the right the woods had been surveyed, and had roads through them; but on the left stretched forests never yet surveyed: the haunt of the tiger, the rhinoceros, and the elephant.

The Lovelaces did not live in a bungalow. Aware that his estate—on account of its distance from the other plantations and from a military station—was exposed in an unusual manner to danger from his wild neighbours, Mr. Lovelace had built a substantial stone house, two storeys high. With some idea of imitating the Alhambra, he had erected it round the four sides of a very large open court, in the centre of which he placed a stone tank with a fountain in its midst, the water of which was supplied from a deep and excellent well—a treasure of no small account—which he had dug in the same court, and covered with an ornamental pinnacle. On the edges of this tank were placed pots of the sweetest and brightest flowers, and on the terrace round it were seats and lounges under a verandah.

The avenue up to the house was shaded by very large golden-flowered mimosas, and the entrance was at the south side of the square. A pretty hall, with leopard and tiger-skins lying about on the floor, led right through the dwelling to the centre court; the flowers and fountain were seen through the open front door.

On each side of the hall was a room: one a dining-room, the other a drawing-room. From the latter one went into a pretty morning-room for the ladies, on the right or eastern side of the square; from the dining-room one entered Mr. Lovelace's office.

The north side of the square was the storehouse for

the tea, and had in it the apartments of Mr. Lovelace's clerks, who were Eurasians, clever young men, experienced in the business. Mr. Brown, the manager, also an Eurasian, had a bungalow of his own in the tea gardens, from which he could overlook the little Coolie settlement.

This northern side of the house, which was only one room thick or wide, had a glass gallery facing the court, full of flowers—a sort of greenhouse or conservatory. Behind it was the godown, as it is called; *i.e.*, the storehouses, and the huts for the servants' families. On the first floor were the bed-rooms and bath-rooms. The furniture of the house was simple, as all Indian furniture is in a general way; though there were Persian rugs of great beauty laid on the matting which covered the floors, and small marble tables and every kind of easy chair and couch in the drawing-room. Mr. Lovelace possessed also valuable plate, china, and glass. Mr. Dunmore, therefore, found himself in a house of far greater luxury than he had anticipated.

A delightful nursery, and an *ayah* whom they had brought from Calcutta to attend on her and her charge, threw Algy's nurse into raptures. The two elder boys had a large room, double-bedded, which opened into Dick's smaller chamber, with an adjoining bath of great size compared to the English bath. They were intensely interested in the new features of their surroundings.

The beds were small iron ones, the posts standing in stone cups full of water, which served to arrest the journeys of objectionable insects upwards. Looped up at the head by day, and tightly tucked in at night, were lace curtains to keep the mosquitoes from biting the sleepers,—the mosquito nets as they are called.

The boys were warned of the necessity of slipping

under them quickly, and, in fact, they had already made the acquaintance of mosquitoes in Malta and Sicily, and had a natural horror of them. Nevertheless, the first night of their residence under Mr. Lovelace's roof Dick allowed one to get inside his curtains, and the boys in the next room were roused from their first sleep by their comrade's groans and lamentations.

"What 's the matter?" asked Lance, sitting up in bed.

"Oh," cried Dick, "I am nearly mad. There is a brute of a mosquito got into my bed, and he won't let me have a moment's peace. I declare I shouldn't mind the bites if he didn't keep up such trumpeting round my head."

"We 'll help you," replied Harold, jumping out, but securely tucking in his own curtains after he had crept from under them.

There is always a night-light in an Indian chamber: a tumbler, with a sufficient supply of oil floating on water, holds the wick; unless the more modern Anglo-Indian uses English night-lights, which are more expensive.

The boys were favoured with the old-fashioned tumbler. By its light, however, they proceeded to Dick's room, and found him out of bed also; then all three provided themselves with towels, and whisked and whisked violently inside the mosquito curtains, in which performance Harold received a violent flick in the eye from Lance, which for a moment checked their laughter at the mosquito-hunt. At length Dick was freed from his enemy, and the boys, with many mocking recommendations to him "to be a good boy and go to sleep," returned to their own room to find that they had the same work to perform for Lance.

As they were dressing the next morning, a shout came from Dick's room.

"Hillo! what 's the matter now?" asked Lance.

"Oh! I say," cried Dick, "come and look here. I was going to brush my hair, and my brush is full of ants."

And the boys running in, saw that the dressing-table and brushes were covered with those insects.

"I saw a whole posse of them drawing a cockroach just now when I was in the bath," said Harold. "They had turned the poor beetle upon his back, and a number dragged him along for a very little while; then they were relieved by a relay from the multitude which followed them. They seem to swarm."

After watching the ants for a few minutes, and lending Dick a brush, the boys hastened their toilettes, anxious to go out in the lovely garden that they could see from their windows, from which came the heavy perfumes of the tropical flowers.

It was still very early. The sun was only just gilding the tops of the eastern hills, and the air was sweet and fresh. The caw of the crows had roused them at day-break, and soon after they had heard the men filling their baths, and had jumped up. Now dressed, they ran down-stairs and passed through the pretty centre hall, which ran right through the house, into the avenue, and from thence by a path shaded by oleanders (which grew on the banks of a tiny rivulet) to the garden they had seen from their window.

Dick was soon engrossed by the lovely flowers and trees, and his knowledge of and taste for botany enabled him to tell his companions a great deal about the plants, which he recognized though he saw them for the first time. A child's merry laugh told them that Algy was in the garden, and he burst suddenly from behind a hedge of jessamine, shouting, "Halald! Halald! Oh! look at ze pretty butterflies."

Harold caught him up and ran away with him; Algy laughing, and grasping the boy's hair in his small hands, while the nurse followed smiling.

The two other boys gave chase to Harold and Algy, and they were in rather a state of over-heat, when a servant in a white garment, girt round his waist with a crimson *cumberbund*, or scarf, appeared, and summoned them to breakfast. The boys gladly obeyed the summons, resigning Algy to his nurse, to whom the servant said, however,

"Must not let baba go amongst tufts of rose-trees—very often cobra in them. Keep on grass lawn."

And then he turned and followed the boys into the house.

The Lovelaces and Mr. Dunmore were already seated at a table laden with good things. An Indian breakfast is even a more abundant morning meal than a Scotch one, and Harold could not help smiling to himself as he thought what Sir Jasper would say to it—he whose morning meal consisted of a few scraps of bacon, a little stale bread and butter, and weak tea. Here there was fish freshly caught from the river (which was at no great distance), spatchcocked chicken, delicious curry, roast quails, and delicate bread-cakes, rolls, toast, etc., with tea, coffee, and chocolate, guava jelly, oranges, and bananas. The boys were quite ready to do justice to the repast.

Beatrice exclaimed in rapture at the delicious guava jelly, and wanted to know if the fresh guava was also nice to eat.

"Everything here is charming!" she said. "The air is so sweet, the flowers so beautiful. Look at my bouquet of stephanotis!"

"Yes," said her father; "there is much beauty all about us, Bee. By-and-bye, at sundown, you shall walk through the orange groves, and also visit the tea gardens."

"That will be pleasant!" she replied.

"It's an awfully jolly place," said Dick.

Mr. Lovelace laughed.

"I must give you boys one warning," he said. "Never venture far from the plantation in two directions: one is over the crest of the hills; the other into the forests which bound my property on the east. On the other side of the hill are wild tribes of Nagas, by no means trustworthy, though supposed to be on friendly terms with us; in the forests are tigers, panthers, bears, rhinoceroses, elephants, and pythons."

"Why, you beat the Zoo into fits, Uncle Tom!" said Dick. "But we should dearly like to hunt a tiger or an elephant; shouldn't we, boys?"

A dual assent was, of course, given.

"Well, some day we may take you to hunt one; but remember, you are never to venture into the forests alone."

About five o'clock that afternoon the whole party were escorted through the tea gardens by Mr. Lovelace's manager, Mr. Brown; the proprietor himself accompanying them. He had much to see in the plantation after his long absence.

He was much gratified by the improvements made by Mr. Brown, while his guests were delighted by the beauty and peculiar fragrance of the gardens. The lovely tea-shrubs, with their pure white blossoms, won Beatrice's admiration.

"The blossoms are just like wild roses," she said, "only they are white, and the leaves are like myrtle-leaves."

The trees rose from three to six feet in height, but the

lower measure was the general one kept, as being more convenient for gathering the leaves.

Mr. Dunmore was greatly interested in the scene. He had never before seen a tea garden. Mr. Lovelace told him that this plant was originally found growing wild in Assam about 1823 by Mr. Bruce; that on the hills at the upper end of the valley in its wild state it often reached the height of twenty feet, but that the cultivated shrubs were purposely kept low.

"Do you not think, then, that the Chinese may have obtained the plant from Assam when it belonged, ages ago, to Burmah?" asked Mr. Dunmore.

"Very likely," was the reply; "but they alone understood its cultivation, and the dressing and preparing of the leaves for the market. Chinamen were at first imported to teach the management of the shrub and leaf, but now Coolies brought from Bengal work on the plantations. However, we have retained a few Chinamen."

"What language do the people speak?" asked Mr. Dunmore. "Bengali?"

"Not quite; there is a great affinity between the languages, but also there are differences. Formerly the law courts were held in the Bengali dialect alone; but now the Government recognize the dialect of Assam. I have been teaching it to Dick ever since Christmas, and he can make himself understood. I will try him."

And Mr. Lovelace addressed his nephew in "Assamese," and received quite a fluent answer.

"A clever lad," said the uncle to Mr. Dunmore. "He will make his way well."

"Are the natives a good race?" asked Mr. Dunmore, glancing at a passing servant.

"Yes, they are kind, good-natured, brave, and amongst

themselves hospitable. They are most excellent sons and fathers. The higher class women here are also allowed to go out, and do not hide themselves as other native women do. The Assamese is a fairer complexioned man than his Bengal cousin, and seems more akin in feature to the Chinese."

They had now walked a considerable way uphill, when suddenly Mr. Lovelace paused.

"Why, Brown," he said, "this garden extends beyond my grant, does it not?"

The manager laughed.

"Well, yes, sir," he answered, "this land is beyond the Government line, but it was in such a good aspect that I ventured to enclose it. No one used it."

"Was it no one's property?" asked his employer, looking puzzled.

"Well, in reality it belonged to no one. It was an abandoned waste; but since I have planted it the Naga chief has come down on me for the price. I assure you, sir, I never expected he would claim it; and he did not till, by planting it, I had made it valuable. It was a spot free of trees, which years and years ago they had burned down, in order to sow their grain on the ashes. They reaped a harvest on it, and then, as they always do, abandoned it. So I thought we might take it."

"It must be paid for," said Mr. Lovelace, very gravely. "I am sorry that you enclosed it, Brown, without first arranging to do so with the chief."

"It makes the plantation much more valuable," muttered Mr. Brown, looking annoyed.

Mr. Lovelace made no reply, but walked on, frowning and seriously examining the unwelcome addition to his land.

"Dick," said Lance in a whisper, "I don't care for Master Brown: I don't like the cut of his jib."

"Nor do I," responded Dick; "he looks an awful cad, and his nails are so queer. Where ours are pink his are nearly black."

"He is a half-caste—an Eurasian, they call him," whispered Beatrice. "But papa says he manages the Coolies wonderfully."

"Are the Coolies slaves?" asked Lance.

"Oh, no! We have no slaves, Lance; they are hired labourers from Bengal. I heard papa say that the Government protects them by wise laws; but I daresay Mr. Brown does not care for laws made in Calcutta. The Coolies look greatly delighted at seeing papa back again."

Little artificial rivulets ran through the plantation, and in a pond at one end of these Beatrice found quite a spoil of water-lilies.

"From whence do you get the water for this irrigation?" asked Mr. Dunmore.

"From a branch of the Kupili, which runs to the west of the plantation," was the reply. "We are blest with many streams here."

"And have you good fishing?" asked Harold eagerly.

"Yes; and we have an enormously big fish in the river called the *mahsir*. It weighs sometimes as much as sixty pounds."

"There will be no objection to our fishing, I suppose?" said Harold, who loved the once needful sport.

"No; not in the spots which will be shown you," said Mr. Lovelace.

Then, turning, they proceeded back towards the house. The walk was rather a long one, but passing through an

orange-grove they came at last to a very high stone wall, on which was quite a *chevaux de frise* of sharp iron points.

"Oh, Uncle Tom! what is this fortification?" asked Dick, astonished.

"It encloses a portion of the godown," said his uncle, "containing the store-houses; and here," as they passed beyond the corner of the wall, "here are the huts belonging to the families of the household servants, also called the godowns."

They stood, in fact, in a cluster of neat huts sheltered by banana-trees, beneath which some little children, who wore only a sort of scarf round them, were seated at play. They rose, and stood looking shyly at the sahibs. Mr. Lovelace and the ladies spoke kindly to them, and patted their heads, but were warned by Mr. Lovelace not to praise or admire them, lest the mothers, who had now issued from the huts, should be afraid of the Evil Eye; indeed, one or two did look uneasy.

"What is the Evil Eye, Uncle Tom?" asked Dick.

"It is a very old superstition, met with in Italy and many other countries, as well as here. Don't you remember the charms the women near Naples wore, to avert the misfortunes which an evil look may bring?"

"Oh, yes! I had forgotten."

Beyond a clump of trees they saw a well, from which a boy was drawing water. Passing it, Mr. Lovelace drew a key from his pocket, and opened an iron door in the wall (which ran still beside them as they walked), and admitted them into the enclosure in which were the store-houses. From thence they entered the back of the house, the clerks' portion of it, and here Mr. Brown respectfully took his leave.

The hall in this side of the square was as large as that

at the entrance, but was lined with chests of tea, and evidently was of great service; from it they entered the narrow line of conservatory, and from thence passed into the court of the fountain, as Beatrice named it, where the sparkling water fell in prismatic hues on that lying in the basin. The air was redolent of the scent of orange-blossoms and stephanotis.

"Oh, how exquisite!" cried Beatrice. "It reminds me of the Alhambra."

"It is pretty," said her stepfather, smiling. "You will like to sit out here, Bee, in the heat of the day, and listen to the plash of the fountain, will you not?"

"Indeed I shall!" said Beatrice, enthusiastically.

The English boys were very much pleased with everything they saw, and still more delighted when Mr. Lovelace said he hoped soon to show them the native sport of spearing the tiger by moonlight. Dick at once begged that they might have spears given them, to practise throwing them, and Mr. Lovelace promised that they should have them.

When Mr. Lovelace and his guest were sitting in the verandah that evening after dinner, Mr. Lovelace said,

"I am a little vexed with Brown for enclosing that land, —the hill tribes resent such things more than he knows. You see, they had had the labour of clearing it of trees themselves. That is how they cultivate, or rather, *use* the land for their harvests: they burn down the trees for a certain space, and then in that virgin earth sow their grain, which yields always a full harvest. They don't often use the same plot a second time, but they look on the clearing as still their own."

"It is a pity to have roused ill feeling in such neighbours," said Mr. Dunmore.

"And there is something else: I don't believe that Brown is as honest as I thought him. With so much more ground under cultivation, I ought to have had a larger sale of tea than that for which he accounts. You see what follows the lack of the master's eye," he added.

"I did not like the man's face, to tell you the truth," said Mr. Dunmore; "I thought he did not look pleasantly at Dick."

"He fears another eye on him, perhaps; or he is jealous of Dick. Well, that doesn't matter; he can't hurt the lad, and Dick will be of immense service to me, I foresee. He is a good accountant and shrewd; though I don't think he is what bookish men would call clever."

"He is a first-rate young fellow," said Mr. Dunmore, with enthusiasm, "and I am thankful that Harold has such a friend. But how, if you were attacked by the hill tribes, would you defend yourself?"

"Well, our walls are thick and strong, and every upper window has an iron shutter, which would at any moment cover the Venetian. The verandah has also iron sliding shutters, which completely shut it in when required."

"And your garrison?" said Mr. Dunmore; "would the Coolies be of use?"

Mr. Lovelace laughed.

"No," he said, "they would fly in all directions at the least alarm. But we have a number of servants, and the Assamese are brave; and there are my three clerks, Dick, and myself. We could hold our own till aid came from the soldiers."

"And how far off is the military station?"

Mr. Lovelace shrugged his shoulders.

"Twenty miles by our country paths," he said; "a little nearer through the woods."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ORANGE GROVE.

THE next morning Lance was the first of the boys to go downstairs. In the hall he saw Beatrice standing with her hat on.

"Oh, Lance," she said, "I am so glad you are come; I want to go out and have a walk through the orange grove before breakfast. Will you go? Where are the others?"

"They are engaged in mortal combat, the weapons used being bolsters," he replied, laughing. "Dick enjoys a lark of that sort as much as if he were still a schoolboy."

"He is not much else," she said, laughing. "Then shall we go by ourselves?"

Lance assented, and they went out of the back door, crossed the court of the fountain, and went through the opposite hall to the enclosure. Here a servant, who was taking potatoes into a shed near the godown, opened the iron door and let them out. They passed through the collection of native huts, and ascended the hill, inhaling with delight the sweet, fresh, cool air of early morning. As they walked on, Beatrice said,

"Lance, did you ever hear of the Thugs?"

"Of course," said Lance; "years ago, when I was a little

chap, I read a novel called 'The Thug,' and couldn't sleep after it. Are there Thugs here?"

"Why," she said, "of course there are! I have read that they are all over India. Oh! in a book I saw on board the steamer, there was an account of how the Thugs were first found out. A jar came floating down the river with a cut-up dead body in it, and a rajah who was sitting on the steps down to the water saw the jar, had it drawn on shore, and found one of his European officers inside it. And so he discovered that the country was full of Thugs."

"But what river was it found in?" asked Lance, interested; "and how did finding the jar, tell them that there was a society of murderers?"

"Oh, I forget the name of the river: I think it was the Brahmaputra, but I'm not sure, and I forget how they traced it to the Thugs."

Beatrice never knew anything clearly, and was quite wrong as usual as to the river. Dick always told her her facts needed a local habitation and a date!

"I know they had followed the officer for miles and miles," she went on, "and they succeeded at last in throwing their dreadful noose over his head, and strangling him. He could not always keep his eyes on them, you know."

"Did he know they were following him?" asked Lance.

"I don't know; but I have heard that a Thug never attacks any one whose eyes are fixed on him. He throws the noose from behind a man's back; so even a powerful armed soldier is not safe with a Thug behind him."

"Indeed, no!" said the lad, laughing; "and ugh!" with a shudder, "it must be a horrid thing to be lassooed." And then he directed his companion's attention to the

strange appearance around them, caused by the ascent of the dew.

It was still early morning, but the sun had risen, and coils of cloud-like dew were ascending from the grass and herbs, in wreaths of mist; reminding Lance, he said, of the coils of the giant in the "Arabian Nights" coming out of the vase when the fisherman removed the seal. Beatrice made him tell her the story, but as soon as it was done returned to the Thugs.

Now, as these Oriental assassins may not be amongst our readers' acquaintances, we will just say that they are worshippers of the murdering god—whose temple at Dahpoorie we have ourselves seen—and that they show most devotion to their horrible deity when they sacrifice human life: their devotion being also allied with self-interest of a mundane character, as they almost invariably choose rich victims to slay and rob. They are a secret society, and members of it may, of course, be found everywhere. Their mode of killing their victim was or is by getting unseen behind him, cleverly throwing a noose over his head, and strangling him. This was always done when he was off his guard, and probably engaged in conversation by an accomplice. This guild, or society of assassins, was discovered—we believe in the Deccan—and officers and men for the suppression of Thuggee were established half a century ago. But whether the secret assassins are utterly stamped out, or whether they still exist, one can never be sure—at least, Thuggee is much restrained now.

Beatrice had read an old volume of Miss Roberts's "Overland Journey to India"—written more than forty years ago—and the story of the jar on the Sutlej had caught her fancy by its romantic horror.

IN THE ORANGE GROVE.

Lance listened. He was fascinated by her vague descriptions of these dreadful beings. Like a dream, too, came faint reminiscences of the book which had driven sleep from his childish pillow, and which once more excited his imagination. But the dew coils ceased ascending from the grassy pathway, and he declared that it was time to go back to the house.

"We can return by the orange grove as we did yesterday, and go round to the front entrance," he said; and Beatrice readily assented.

They soon entered the wide centre walk of the orange grove, and breathed the scented air of orange blossoms which, with ripe fruit, grew on the same tree. The oranges were some golden, some green, though ripe, and Beatrice uttered rapturous expressions of delight, declaring that before they left the grove she must gather some. "But not yet," she added, "because I don't want to carry them far."

They had reached about the middle of the orange grove when Beatrice's eyes fell on a native in a very slight costume, seated beneath the trees on the edge of the pathway, and holding in his hand a rope with a running noose in it, which he was examining. She started, and whispered to Lance, "Look there!" Lance also was startled. "Is he a Thug?" she whispered.

"I shouldn't think so—in this plantation," he replied; "they wouldn't dare come so close to people's dwellings."

"Oh, but they are often amongst the household servants," she said. "It is a secret society, you know. No one can tell who is, or who is not, a Thug."

"Well, I shall speak to him," said Lance, courageously; and he went up to the man, who rose and salaamed respectfully.

"Why are you sitting here?" asked the English boy —in his own language. "And what is the use of that rope?" pointing to it.

The man shook his head, and signified that he did not understand the speaker, both by gestures, and by words which were unintelligible to Lance.

"I don't think he is any harm," said the lad, returning to Beatrice; "he looks quiet enough."

"Oh, of course! so they all do. But he has a dreadful countenance," she said, with a shudder. "Do let us go on as fast as we can, Lance. But, oh! we must not take our eyes off him; you must keep your head turned and look at him continually, and when you are tired *I* will turn and look at him."

"That would be an awful bore," said the midshipman; "the shorter plan would be to knock him down if he follows us."

"Oh, you mustn't indeed touch him," expostulated Beatrice, "their vengeance would follow all the family; and besides, Uncle Tom told Richard in my hearing that he was never to strike a native. No, indeed you mustn't."

Lance looked as he felt, annoyed and worried; to knock a man down only for following him was a strong measure; yet to allow him to justify it by throwing the lasso, was death. Moreover, he had grave doubts as to the man's being a Thug.

But, after all, the man might not follow them; so he went on with Beatrice, who instantly assumed the part of watcher, and walked on with her head turned, looking back.

Almost immediately she gasped, "Oh, Lance, he *is* following us!"

"Well," said Lance, "if he throws the noose, it will be at me first; as you are looking perhaps he won't try. If he attempts to do so, I will knock him down."

"But you won't be able," she sighed; "you will be choked."

They proceeded at a brisk walk, for Lance positively refused to run. To show fear, he told Beatrice, would give the Thug courage to attack them.

At last Beatrice said, "Oh, Lance, my throat aches so; will *you* look back at him now?" She did not turn her head to speak to him, but kept her blue eyes earnestly fixed on the native's face all the time she spoke.

"Well, if I must," said Lance, reluctantly. And Beatrice turned her head straight with a weary sigh.

As she did so the man paused; but when Lance looked back at him, he again slowly but closely followed. And thus they went on: if for a moment Lance glanced aside —for fear did not fix his gaze as it had Beatrice's—when he looked again the man was sure to raise his noose; threateningly, Lance thought. The poor boy really believed his head would never get right again, so painful grew the unnatural posture thus long sustained; and he uttered a mental thanksgiving when they reached the end of the grove, for there the man paused, and then gradually retreated back into its shades.

"He is gone!" said Lance, drawing a deep breath.

And then with a wild scream of long-repressed excitement, Beatrice darted away from him and ran at full speed towards the house. Lance followed her more slowly.

When he entered the breakfast-room he found her relating with hysterical tears their "dreadful adventure" to the surprised family. They could not understand

much from her incoherent words, save that she and Lance had been attacked by a Thug. As soon as they saw him, therefore, Mr. Lovelace said,

"Lance, what has happened? Do tell us what Bee means by this Thug story."

Lance, rather shyly, related their adventure; he felt annoyed to have to say that he had, if not "run," at least "walked" away from danger. And Beatrice's interruptions of "Oh, Lance! weren't we dreadfully frightened?" "Oh! didn't we tremble?" added to his annoyance. This reached its acme when Mr. Lovelace burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"My dear boy," he said, when Lance ceased speaking, "you were both under the greatest delusion. The man whom you took for a Thug is the keeper of the orange grove; the rope and noose he uses to draw down the higher branches of the orange-trees to gather the fruit. I dare-say, when he saw you incessantly looking back at him, he understood that you wanted him to follow you to some particular tree to get you oranges from it."

The annoyance of Lance was extreme; but being a good-tempered boy, he did not show it more than he could possibly help.

"I can't think," he said to the other two boys when they were alone, "how I could have been such a goose; but Beatrice had been telling me one of her cock-and-bull stories about Thugs—and really the fellow's noose was to me inexplicable."

"I don't think you were a goose," said Harold. "I think the mistake was very natural, and that you were quite right to keep your eye on the suspected individual."

But Dick could not resist chaffing Lance, who, as the eldest of the three, and one of her Majesty's naval officers,

had rather taken the lead in most matters hitherto. He asked Lance if he would ever be able to get his throat straight again; called him a "stiffnecked individual;" and even at tiffin kept up the remembrance of the joke by making a noose in his pocket-handkerchief, with which he whisked slyly at the flies. But Lance had the sense to laugh at him, instead of resenting the "chaff," and by-and-bye the matter dropped.

CHAPTER XXV.

FIGHTING WITH HIS EYES.

LANCE, however, was destined to be able shortly to prove that it is no slight sign of courage to look danger in the face. Mr. Lovelace insisted on his riding with the other boys, and had taken some trouble about giving him a few needful instructions; but Lance did not yet promise to be a good horseman. His seat was not very good, and he repeatedly forgot that he was not steering a boat, and would pull the reins in the contrary direction to that in which he wished to go. Still, he had never had a fall yet, and they rode every day on the hill-side, or through the country tracks in the valley.

Mr. Lovelace and Mr. Dunmore one day accepted an invitation from one of the neighbouring planters—who, as well as the native gentlemen, had all called on the returned family—to a "pig-sticking" or hog-hunt, at which Dick earnestly begged that "we three boys" might assist; but he begged in vain.

In the first place Mr. Lovelace told him that they should be guests for both the day and night at Mr. Smith's, who had invited them, and that he could not take three boys with him; in the second, that the sport would, as yet, be too dangerous for Lance, who rode so badly; therefore they must be content to stay at home.

They were disappointed, but consoled themselves in the morning by examining a lot of silkworms which Mr. Prince, one of the clerks, had given to Dick, and with which, he assured Harold, he intended to make his fortune. "For," he said, "the silkworm mulberry-tree grows here, you know; the worms are first-rate. Silk is one of the productions of Assam. I feel convinced that my worms will in the end beat Uncle Tom's tea."

In the afternoon they coaxed Mrs. Lovelace to let them take Beatrice for a ride on the hills, and to take little Algy as the companion of her own drive; but the lady only consented on condition that they should be accompanied by the head gorrawallah or groom, a steady man, who had been long in Mr. Lovelace's service. No objection, of course, could be made to this, nor to her other desire that Lance should have the quietest horse in Mr. Lovelace's stables. And, indeed, when Lance was mounting, the gorrawallah assured Mrs. Lovelace, who had come to the hall door to see them start, that Asia (the steed assigned to the young sailor) was so quiet and steady-nerved that "she would stand still enough for her rider to shoot a tiger," a test to which Lance, laughing, said he would not expose her.

The ride along the hill-sides and summit was a very pleasant one; the boys were proud of having Beatrice committed to their care, and they did their best to amuse her. But after sunset the gorrawallah suggested the necessity of returning home, and they had reached a wider and better road on the summit of a hill, on their homeward way, when an antelope bounded up from the jungle which sloped down on each side of the track, and ran before them. The temptation was too great for the younger boys. They started after it with a glad

shout, and were in a moment or two out of sight in pursuit of it; though, as they had no guns, they could do nothing but chase it. But Beatrice, when she saw them turn off the main road, was alarmed.

"Oh, dear!" she cried; "those boys will get into some trouble. Pray," turning to the gorrawallah riding behind, "pray go after the sahibs and say that the mem sahib" —her mother—"desired us all to keep together, and not to ride down the other side of the hill."

The gorrawallah at once obeyed, for the "Missee Baba" was a ruling power already in the house. So he rode fast after the delinquents, while Beatrice told Lance that they had better walk their horses till the others returned, or they would arrive before the boys at the house; and Mrs. Lovelace might be uneasy about them, or perhaps angry with them. Lance assented to this, and they walked their horses till they reached a part of the road where a thick tuft of underwood and high shrubs, extending for a quarter of a mile, bordered one side of the way. Here, suddenly, Lance stopped his horse, with his eyes fixed on this spot of jungle.

"Beatrice," he said, softly, "don't scream or answer me, but ride on at a gallop after the others, and tell them to bring men and guns to me here from the shikarries' huts. Hush! don't speak—go."

And greatly alarmed, but obedient and brave, Bee galloped off, while Lance sat like a statue on his horse, with his eyes fixed on the thicket. They held and detained those of a huge panther! Crouching there, it had been arrested in its spring by his gaze, and was still daunted by it. He remained quite still — even when speaking to Beatrice he had never moved his eyes; but they began to ache and dazzle a little at last.

"I wonder," he thought, "if the brute will outstare me in the end, and then eat me? Oh, a Thug is nothing to a panther! How green the fire in his eyes is!"

The moments seemed ages to him, yet Beatrice had ridden at full speed, and met the boys and groom returning. She breathlessly gave Lance's message.

"Ride on to the shikarries' huts," said Dick to the groom (they were not far off), "and take the missie with you. Harold and I will ride back to Lance, Bee—there may be 'a tiger in the path.'" And the boys set off at full gallop.

As the welcome sound of their approaching horses hoofs reached Lance, it reached also the ears of the panther, which suddenly crept back into the jungle.

"Hallo, Lance, what is it?" cried Dick, from a distance.

And Lance, now relieved by the disappearance of his foe, rode up to meet them.

"I was holding an interview with a panther," he said, "and it grew wearisome."

"With a panther! Where is he?" cried Harold.

"He has stolen back into the jungle," said Lance; "the brute nearly outstared me. You know we have always been told that wild beasts dread the human eye. Well, I caught this fellow's just as he was about to spring, and I never left off staring, till either the sound of your approaching hoofs drove him away, or else his eyes were tired."

A tremendous growling and rustling in the jungle interrupted him.

"Oh! that is why he went off," cried Lance, as they perceived—close by the spot he had just left—a panther, fighting for life with two huge hounds, burst out of the thicket. In a minute or two more the owner of the

dogs broke from the jungle, and, raising a rifle, shot the panther right through the head.

Then he saw the boys, who rode up to him uttering exclamations of surprise.

"A savage beast," he said, laughing up at them; "a black panther."

Harold exclaimed, "Then you were not mistaken, Lance. Really, when you said you had outstared a panther, I fancied you must have taken a wild cat for one; I thought a panther never could have been so easily daunted."

"What is that?" asked the stranger, a handsome young man in sporting costume.

The boys told him how Lance had held back the panther. He was much interested.

"I have known similar instances," he said. "General Sir Charles Napier did exactly the same thing as this young gentleman; he sent on Lady Napier, who was riding with him, alone; and held *two* leopards with his eagle eyes till the help she went to bring came. But it was a very cool thing for a boy like you to do. I must give you the panther's skin in recompence of your courage. He turned back no doubt because he smelt the hounds."

"We did not hear them bay," said Harold.

"No, they are Assam wild dogs tamed; they do not give tongue, but hunt silently.

"Ah, here come my shikarries," he added, as two native huntsmen issued from the jungle. He gave them some orders in their own tongue, and they hastened to draw off the dogs from the panther and skin it. The stranger then asked the boys' names, and on hearing them, shook Dick by the hand.

"Your uncle and I are good friends and near neigh-

bours," he said. "In fact, I am his nearest neighbour. My name is Vivien—you may have heard it. I am glad to have made your acquaintance. Ah, here comes the rescue, rather after time!" as the young lady, the groom, and the shikarries with guns running by the horses, appeared.

The affair was at once explained when Beatrice came up, and all went to look at the panther which Dick declared Lance had mesmerized.

"You had better take care, Bee," he whispered to his cousin, "or he will mesmerize you, and make you run after him wherever he pleases. Joseph Balsamo was a fool to Lance."

Lance now introduced Mr. Vivien, who congratulated the young lady on her escape, and paid Lance a high compliment for his presence of mind. They chatted pleasantly for some minutes, then Beatrice asked Mr. Vivien—as he must be fatigued with a day's sport—if he would go home with them (their house was not far off) and rest? Mr. Vivien at once accepted the invitation, told his shikarries to bring the panther's skin to Mr. Lovelace's compound, and went back with the young people, walking beside Beatrice's horse, and complimenting her on her ready obedience and her courage.

"The panther would have sprung out at you," he said, "at the least sign of fear. You are well fitted for a dweller in the East, Miss Lovelace."

Dick, seeing the admiration in the stranger's eyes and Beatrice's pretty blushes, touched Harold with his whip, and whispered significantly, "Spoons."

Mrs. Lovelace received Mr. Vivien as an old acquaintance, and asked him why he had not been to see them before. He replied that he had been absent for a time

from home, and was, like themselves, only just returned. Then the story of the panther had again to be told; but this time behind Lance's back, for the boys had run out into the hall to receive the skin when it should come. And also, Harold declared, because Lance, like Coriolanus, disliked to hear "his nothings monstered." In consequence of which assertion they chose henceforward to call him Corioli.

"Lance! Lance!" cried Harold, the next morning; "come here, quickly. The jugglers and snake-charmers are here!"

Lance speedily obeyed the summons and joined the family, who were seated on an open space of gravel just in front of the house, shut in on one side by a jessamine hedge of some thickness, and, behold! there were assembled the jugglers and snake-charmers of the East. The snake charming began the performance. From one of those large soft elastic baskets used by the *borers*—*i.e.*, pedlars—of the East, the snake-charmer brought forth his hideously beautiful pets. You will say the terms are a contradiction; but just think of the really beautiful colours of the animal, of its graceful coils, of its bright eyes; and you will see that it is beautiful in form and colour, and yet hideous because it is an embodiment of a most cruel nature. Instinctively men fear and hate that terrible beauty.

But the snake-charmers had no fear; they drew out the dreadful things and let them crawl and twine round them; raised them above their heads, knotted them up, made them move in a queer rhythmical measure on the head of a drum, which they called a dance; nay, they were taken to the spectators, and one long snake—it was a water-snake, and therefore harmless—was suffered to

coil round Beatrice, who stood up to permit it. It looked up at her with its wicked eyes, then, at a sound from its master's instrument, fell off her. The girl shuddered strongly as she was released from its folds, and Mr. Vivien—who had called in and joined the spectators whilst the reptile was round her—was quite pale with emotion.

"How could you permit such a thing?" he asked of Mr. Lovelace, almost indignantly.

"It is a harmless creature," said his friend, laughing; "a water-snake. I should not have allowed her to play with a cobra."

"Good heavens! I should think not. Do you not know that the charmers are often bitten? The teeth are drawn, and the snake is then harmless; but the fangs grow again, often without the charmer's perceiving them, and then you may guess the result."

The boys were glad when the other performances commenced.

The men brought forward one of those baskets, to which we have already alluded, used by *borers*—or pedlars—which lie nearly flat when not used, being made of perfectly soft plaited straw, but, when full, swell to some size and thickness. At each end of this basket they placed a tripod, with sweet spices and perfumes burning in it; then the juggler, beating a tom-tom and invoking his gods, walked round them. He then took a boy of about twelve years old—a lithe, dark, smiling boy—bound his hands and feet together, and bent his knees up to his chin; then he put him into a kind of net like a cabbage-net, and carried him round the circle in it, for every one to inspect it, and see how closely he was bound. Dick, Lance, and Harold laughed as they caught the

glitter of the boy's sparkling eyes through the meshes, and held the net themselves. Then the juggler placed him, still in the net, in the basket, which of course rose up and seemed full. The juggler covered it with a black pall; then, taking a naked sword, he thrust it into the basket, through it, round it, in every corner. One would have thought that the boy within it had no place of refuge from the deadly weapon. Then suddenly the juggler approached Beatrice.

"The lad," he said, "shall now—as he has escaped death—be turned into any kind of animal the Missie Baba wishes. Will she signify her will?"

Mr. Lovelace interpreted his words.

"Oh! change him into a dove, and let him fly to—— where?—oh, to Mr. Vivien's," she replied, laughing, and glancing at their new friend.

The juggler salaamed, and went back to his basket. And then the tom-toming began again, with a strange weird minor chant. The basket sank; the pall lifted; out flew the ligatures which had bound the boy, and forth fluttered a snow-white dove, which the juggler commanded to fly to the bungalow of Vivien sahib.

The bird flew swiftly in the direction named.

"He will be gone thirty minutes," said the juggler; "we have time for beginning to make the mango-tree grow."

A flower-pot was brought, the great stone of the mango was placed in it, covered with earth and water; then it was left for a few moments, while the tumblers exhibited their tricks, standing on each other's hands, arms, and heads, till they formed a pyramid; while some women took water in their mouths, and made it play in *a fountain* from their nose, a trick with which the ladies were disgusted; but at which the boys laughed.

Then a man advanced who was to perform the most wonderful of their arts. He was to lift a heavy, large stone two feet high and two feet wide each way, from the ground by his eyelids!

The stone was examined; the boys with a strain could scarcely raise it in their arms. The juggler proceeded to prepare for lifting it with his eyelids. A strong chain was first attached to a hook in the stone; a finer one hooked into that; again a finer chain; a fourth finer still. All of them were short. The last chain was fastened to a piece of tin about the size of a fourpenny piece. The performer slipped this small disc under his eyelid, and then his companions tied his hands behind him. Of course he was stooping low, for the chains were short; then he began to raise himself, and with himself the great stone. The spectators held their breath. He began slowly, then made a great effort, and behold! the heavy stone rested on his breast, lifted there only by the eyelids.

Beatrice was glad when this "horrid trick" as she called it, was over; especially as Mr. Vivien told her that it was no trick; that the stone was lifted mechanically, not in appearance only, and that the performer must ultimately, and in a comparatively short time, pay for the feat by blindness, therefore an exceptional sum was always paid for the exhibition.

The chief juggler now raised the cover of the flower-pot, and showed a tiny mango-tree, green and strong, the growth of thirty minutes. It was watered and again covered. Then the juggler uttered a shrill weird cry. It was the summons to his dove, and a fluttering of wings was heard. The dove reappeared, and perched on the juggler's shoulder. He raised the pall and put the bird

under it. Then the apparently empty basket again rose and swelled, the pall was thrown back, and the boy appeared again, salaaming all round, and evidently glad to be free once more.*

Then followed the throwing up and catching of oranges; kindling a fire upon a man's head; breaking a cocoanut with the head—*i.e.*, the fruit was thrown up like a ball, caught, and at the same time broken on the performer's head; and finally the mango-tree grown half a yard high!

This closed the performances. Mr. Lovelace and his friends made the party of jugglers a very handsome present, and they departed well pleased.

Our readers will not be very much surprised to hear that loud cries and scolding from Benedetta the next day announced that Algy had pushed a sixpence under his eyelid in imitation of the juggler, and was hurt by the attempt.

* These performances were witnessed by the author at Dahpoorie in the Deccan. They are, by the privilege of fiction, transported here to Assam.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A TIGER-HUNT BY MOONLIGHT.

MR. LOVELACE did not wish his nephew to enter on the office work immediately; he meant Dick first to get acclimatized, and to look about him, and understand the tea gardens and their cultivation a little; therefore the three boys had still a great deal of leisure, but they were never unoccupied.

They went shooting occasionally with Mr. Lovelace and Mr. Dunmore. They rode daily. In the house Dick had his silkworms; and, with the other two boys, stuffed the skins of the birds they shot, or taught a parrot Lance had caught, to talk. The bird was very clever, and learned easily. She also seemed to know the family apart, and at the sight of Beatrice, who often gave her bits of fruit, she would dance on her perch and sing as Lance had taught her, "Bee-Bee is a beautee," with all her might. They also found amusement in talking to Sambo, who was in raptures with his new home. The sunshine, the comforts; the groves of tea, which were new to him, delighted him. He fraternized with the Coolies (whether those from Bengal or China), and was always on the alert to learn the customs of the country and its dialect. Sambo possessed in a strong degree his countrymen's talent for catching up languages

and speaking them in the negro's own fashion, and he soon could make himself intelligible in their language. The boys liked his endless stories of Africa, or of the English ships in which he had sailed. Sambo had had no end of adventures, and related them so comically, that the boys used to roar with laughter, both with him and at him. Then in the afternoon they had long and pleasant rides with Mr. Dunmore and Mr. Lovelace, and saw a great deal of the country. Lance, however, who did not much care for riding—his leg being still a little weak—frequently went in the carriage for a drive with Mrs. Lovelace, Beatrice, and little Algy.

One evening about five o'clock, as they were driving —Lance with them—on the top of a hill, with a declivity on each side full of thick jungle, an incident occurred which considerably startled them. The road was only of sufficient width to allow two carriages to pass each other, when suddenly the horses shied and stood still, trembling all over; the next moment an antelope at its fullest speed darted across the road, and with one tremendous bound a tiger followed it. Happily the chase passed about a dozen yards in advance of the startled horses. The coachman turned round with an exclamation of "Tiger, Mem Sahib!" and, turning his horses, drove back at full speed to the plantation.

The adventure was related at once by the ladies to Mr. Lovelace; who was inclined, as Harold had been, to believe that they had mistaken a tiger-cat for his terrible cousin; but the coachman, who was sent for, confirmed the fact.

"It was a real tiger; and when the sahibs had killed him, he"—the coachman—"would claim the fifty rupees given for the news of a tiger's neighbourhood."

"We must hunt him, of course," said Mr. Lovelace.

Bonfires were kindled that night all round the plantation, and tom-toms beaten loudly to keep off the great beast. Before night fell Mr. Lovelace had sent messengers to all the nearest plantations, to warn them of the neighbourhood of the dreaded animal; but the warning in one instance proved vain. A groom, or gorrawallah, was carried off from Mr. Vivien's compound the same night; and an immediate tiger-hunt was of course arranged.

The boys were delighted; especially as from the tiger's course being traced down towards the river, a boat chase was arranged instead of shooting him from a *machân*, or platform, built against a tree, at some height from the ground. He would be sure to go at night to the stream to drink, and then they could spear him—the Assamese being used to this mode of hunting him. The boys eagerly entreated to be allowed to join the hunting party, and though Mrs. Lovelace rather opposed their wishes, the gentlemen, after sundry promises from the lads that they would be careful and obedient to orders, yielded an assent; and thus it happened that they were of the party who assembled on the shore of the river at sunset next evening to embark on this adventure.

There were three or four large boats—about the size of *bunder* boats, but without the cabin—with crews of Assamese, armed with spears, waiting for them. The gentlemen all had rifles; Sambo, who insisted on being of the party, had armed himself with a huge knife, which he had borrowed from the butcher, and had most carefully sharpened.

The scene, when the brief twilight of the tropics passed into moonlight, was magnificent. The river lay a still

silver pathway with scarcely a ripple on its surface before them in the brilliant moonlight, its banks edged with a wide border of reeds and gigantic grasses, from which now and then a water-bird flew up silently. Mr. Lovelace's boat led the way, and soon was some distance ahead of the others.

Now and then the flitting silent shadow on the water startled some timid antelope drinking of the stream, and it fled swiftly. Once they thought they perceived a bear steal away from amongst the rushes, but they were not to be tempted by other creatures from their pursuit of the terrible maneater.

At length, when they had pulled a little more than a mile, the look-out at the bow raised his hand as a sign to stop. The men rested on their oars, and then, at a second sign, softly approached the land, keeping now rather under cover of the reeds close in shore. And then, at another sign, the hunters quietly shipped their oars, and grasped their spears; for, drinking, and not aware of their presence—they were coming up against the wind, so there was no taint in the air to warn him—they beheld the beautiful and cruel tyrant of the jungle. The thud of a spear on his side was the first indication he received of the presence of his foes. He looked up with a wrathful growl, and drew his body up for a spring; but a flight of spears came on him, and with a yell of anguish he fell on his knees. Mr. Dunmore and Mr. Lovelace simultaneously fired at him, to put him out of his pain. Then he rolled over in the high grass and reeds, dead.

There was a shout of triumph from the Assamese, whose broad Chinese-like faces looked pale in the moonlight, and they called to the coxswain to put in closer to shore. The skin and head of the tiger must be secured.

"Are you sure he is dead?" asked Mr. Lovelace.

The men assured him that he must be, and as the boat touched the reeds they sprang on shore. The boys, who were of course in Mr. Lovelace's boat, were eagerly following, when Mr. Dunmore, who was about to spring on shore, forbade them.

"Stay with Mr. Lovelace," he said; "we may find other dangerous acquaintances here yet. You are needed to take care of the boat."

And the lads drew back reluctantly, remaining with only Mr. Lovelace, the coxswain, and Sambo in the boat. All the rest hurried on shore, for the other boats were approaching, and the men wished to assure their own claims to the reward for killing a tiger.

Only the voices of the men now came from the shore, and Mr. Lovelace had just said, "The tiger is certainly dead," when a tremendous growl burst on their ear, and a huge tigress, who had been stealthily making her way unobserved, by creeping through the reeds and tall grasses, sprang towards them and alighted on the gunwale of the boat—an inch or two would have landed her inside it! As it was, her huge distended jaws were opened to seize Mr. Lovelace (who had laid down his rifle after firing), when Sambo sprang forwards and plunged his knife into her side. The wound was great, but not mortal; it served, however, to divert the tigress from her prey to her new foe. She turned suddenly, and was drawing up her body to spring on the negro, who had dodged instantly over to the other side of the boat, when the three boys, who were standing at the bow—they had been watching the men on shore—fired with perfect aim, and the tigress rolled over into the river dead, dragging the gunwale of the boat down to the

water's edge with her, and thus throwing Dick overboard. He fell on the animal; but succeeded in escaping her terrible claws, outstretched even in death, and the next moment found Lance's hand on his collar.

In a moment the two boys were pulled into the boat by Sambo and Harold, who shouted loudly for help, as they feared the body of the tigress would be washed away from them by the stream; but the hoarse growl of the beast had caused the shore party to run back at once to the spot, and they were now ready to help the boys to get the creature's body on shore. They had witnessed the whole scene, and were vociferous in admiration of the courage of Sambo and the skill of the boys with their rifles.

"You have had a narrow escape," said Mr. Dunmore, pale with emotion, as he grasped his friend's hand.

"Yes; I owe my life to Sambo, whose self-devotion I can never repay," said Mr. Lovelace. "That stab in the animal's side saved me, at his own peril."

"Oh, massa! me tink nothin' of that," said Sambo, proudly. "Couldn't let tigress gobble up massa and not try to save him."

"I had a very narrow escape," said Mr. Lovelace, shuddering. "I actually felt the creature's hot breath in my face."

"But," said the negro, "Sambo not have been here to have massa tank him, if young gentlemen not have fired so coolly."

"It was a horrible danger," said Mr. Dunmore, who was quite pale. "I thought at first that such a mode of tiger-hunting must be safer than on the *machân*."

"No kind of tiger-hunting is without perilous risk," said Mr. Lovelace. "But I must go to our young people.

You had better come also, and leave the boat; our friends are close here now."

The boats had come up; Mr. Vivien's first, and the story had to be told of their danger and of their success in "bagging" two tigers—male and female.

"Then," said Mr. Vivien, "the cubs are in the jungle grass, be sure. The tigress would first hide them before she sprang. Let us go in search of them."

And the hunters landed and started off, the shikarries beating the tall grass and reeds up to the verge of the forest. Soon a cry of triumph from the boys—who, having returned from seeing their tiger safe in the men's hands, were eager for a new adventure, and had started with Mr. Vivien's people—announced that the progeny of the slain tigers had been found; not very small cubs either; but they were soon knocked on the head as too dangerous to be let live, and after a vain search for the traces of more of the majestic game they sought, the party re-embarked, though rather differently: the boys remaining with Mr. Vivien and going in his boat; for which they had cause to rejoice, for after ascending the river for half a mile or so farther, they speared a panther in grand style, and shot a small native bear.

The excitement of this success was great, and the party, satisfied with their night's excursion, made their way back down the river.

"We have killed two tigers, a panther, and a bear," said Dick, exultantly. "That's a pretty fair gain for one night, isn't it, Mr. Vivien?"

"Very good indeed, Dick."

"But," said Dick, "I think I should like a hunt on land better. This is too creepy, stealthy a kind of hunting to please me."

"Yes; the hunt of the tiger on elephants is far pleasanter; on horseback it is still better; but we must take all means of destroying the wild beasts when they appear likely to be dangerous to human life, and we are getting too many into this neighbourhood lately. I think we must let the natives set some traps for them. There would still be enough for sport."

"What traps do they set?" asked Harold.

"They fix a weapon somewhat resembling an old crossbow in the trees, with a poisoned arrow fixed to it. Then they tie a string to the trigger, which if pulled discharges it, and they carry this string across the path low down. The tiger in passing pulls it himself, and thus commits involuntary suicide, for he is usually found dead a few paces off."

"That seems to me a cowardly way of killing them."

"But they are pests which we must destroy as we best can," said Mr. Vivien. "Do you know that a maneater once killed nearly a hundred people near here, and the village would have been depopulated had not an Englishman shot it. In other parts of India tigers have been known to kill a hundred and twenty-seven people in a few weeks."

"Mr. Lovelace says that you have a pack of wild dogs like those you had with you when you killed the panther, do they hunt tigers?" asked Harold.

"Yes; they hunt him in packs of thirty or more, and never leave the chase till he is killed and eaten," said Mr. Vivien. "Are you fond of dogs?"

"Very," said Harold, enthusiastically. (Sir Jasper would never let him keep a pet dog, but he loved the pointers and setters which were allowed for use on the estate.) "I am very fond of dogs."

"Then I will give you a Burmese dog—a very funny creature, I assure you."

Harold thanked Mr. Vivien warmly for this promise.

They were received on landing by a rejoicing crowd from the nearest villages, who looked on the Englishmen as public benefactors for destroying the horrible maneater.

With kindly farewells they parted, and dispersed to their several homes, horses awaiting them all at the landing-place. And thus ended the tiger-hunt by moonlight.

The boys and Sambo were considered quite the heroes of the day, and Mrs. Lovelace declared, when she heard of their adventure, that she had good cause to be glad her wishes had been thwarted—that they had not been left behind at home.

"Their obedience to orders gave them the chance of being so useful," said Mr. Lovelace. "They wanted to go on shore, naturally, to look at the dead tiger, but they obeyed Dunmore and stayed on board; and in the path of duty they met—a tigress," with a laugh.

"And I am glad we did," said Dick. "Sambo is worth a troop of tigers—that nigger is as brave as he is funny."

"We gained something, you see, by our residence on the Arab island," said Beatrice.

"A valuable stowaway," laughed Lance.

Sambo received a good part of the reward for killing a tigress, and was a very happy negro; the boys were equally delighted, though of course they received no part of the reward given to the slayers of the tiger.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DREADFUL ADVENTURE.

MR. VIVIEN did not forget his promise. The Burmese dog arrived in due course at the plantation, and Harold saw an animal about the size of a medium-sized spaniel, hairy as a Scotch terrier, and white and black. As soon as he found himself alone, Karen, as Harold named him from his native place, proceeded to dig a hole in the ground, into which he crawled backwards and remained there, only his nose and red eyes appearing from it. Harold was not charmed by his new pet, but Dick took a strange fancy to the dog and often brought him dainty bits of food. Karen rewarded him by showing great affection to him, and following him about the plantation. But he took a violent dislike to Mr. Brown the manager, and would always snarl when he (Mr. Brown) passed his hole.

Mr. Brown, however, had apparently got over his objection to Mr. Lovelace's nephew, and was very civil and kind to the boys, who were seldom apart. He supplied Dick with fresh mulberry-leaves for his silkworms, taught the parrot himself, and was generally amiable. Also he took pains to teach Dick the working of the tea plantation.

One day he came up to the boys as they were in the

tea gardens, and asked them if they would like a little shooting on the outskirts of the forest which clothed the side of the hills, and shut them in towards the east. They said "yes" with natural eagerness, and ran off at once for their guns.

There could be no objection to their going under Mr. Brown's escort. They had been forbidden to go into the forest by themselves, but not with the manager; so they did not go and ask permission, but as they ran back they met Sambo, who at once declared that he must go with them.

"Golly, Massa Dick!" he said "s'pose you meet tiger! then Sambo the man for him, with his big knife. I not like Massa Brown. I go too—take care of you young gen'lmen."

And the boys readily assented. So the five went into the forest, for although Brown frowned at the negro, and bade him go back to the house, Dick would not let him be browbeaten, and said he should not go without Sambo. The Burmese dog had also joined Dick, and trotted along by his side.

"You had better send that dog back," said Brown, "or he may get into mischief; he is not a sporting dog."

But Karen looked up so wistfully in Dick's face, and wagged his tail so entreatingly, that the boy would not send him back.

"We shan't go into the neighbourhood of wild beasts," he said, "so Karen can do no harm; and, besides, he never barks at anything, he is a mute dog."

Brown growled out something, and they went on. And now their guns were in incessant use, for pheasants abounded, and they had at length two great bags full. Once or twice Sambo had said to Harold,

"Massa Harold, we go too far in forest; much too far."

And Harold had answered, "Mr. Brown will not take us too far, Sambo."

But now Mr. Brown seemed to wake to a sudden consciousness that they *had* proceeded too far, for he looked about him with an air of perplexity, and said,

"I declare I think we have come too far into the woods, young gentlemen; I don't quite know where we are. If you will excuse me, I will go up yonder hill and just see how the land lies. Will you kindly wait here with the game? the bags are rather heavy," and he laid his own down by Dick's feet—Sambo was carrying the other. "I won't be more than three minutes or so gone."

And he went off at a swinging pace. The boys had not had time to say, as they wished, that they would go with him. They watched him disappear behind the trees, surprised and a little vexed; but they stood still and waited.

Suddenly a piteous howl reached their ears, and Dick, who recognized the voice, cried "Karen!" and hurried down the path in front of them from whence the sound came. Alas! he beheld his poor pet with an arrow sticking in his side, his paw entangled in a string. Dick's shout brought the others at once to the spot. By the time they arrived he had drawn the arrow from Karen's neck; but Harold cried out,

"Take care, Dick! Throw it away; it is poisoned."

Dick obeyed at once; and it must have been dipped in a deadly poison indeed, for Karen lived only five minutes longer. Dick had released his paw from the string, and, at Harold's hurried request, was turning back again, when the poor dog staggered, fell down, and died in a strong convulsion. Dick was dreadfully distressed;

he would not leave his dog till he saw that it was dead, and Harold grew anxious. Lance ran on to the place they had left, lest Brown might return and miss them. But when the others also reached the spot, no one but Lance was there. They looked at each other surprised.

"Brown ought to have been back," said Dick.

"Perhaps he has been, and not finding us here, has gone into the wood in search of us," said Lance. "Let us shout, that he may know we are here."

And all four shouted loudly and repeatedly; but no Brown answered or appeared. They grew very uneasy.

"Can he have been picked off by a tiger?" asked Harold in an awed voice.

"I don't know," said Lance. "He might have gone to the top of the hill and back twice by now; but we have not heard of any tigers about here."

"Oh!" said Harold, "they must think there are, for that was a tiger-trap that killed poor Karen. Did you not hear Mr. Vivien tell me about them?"

They had not, and Harold repeated that which the gentleman had told him. They were surprised and alarmed.

"Then Brown may have been carried off by one," said Dick; "and, if so, what shall we do to get home? How shall we find the way?"

No one seemed able to answer this question.

"Massa Dick, I think that fellah not come back any way," said Sambo at last. "We best try to get home 'fore dark."

They unanimously accepted this advice, and set out in the endeavour to retrace their steps. But where there are no paths it is difficult to find the way. The twilight was fast deepening into night—twilight is a mere

swiftly passing shadow there—and though the trees looked exactly like those they had passed before, and they thought they kept in the same direction, they found only a thicker woodland, and no sign of an opening. They were farther in the forest than ever, and now the moon rose in silvery splendour, the shadows seemed to darken and grow thicker, and the noises of an Indian night began :—the boom of the mosquitoes, who already attacked the boys' faces ; the noise of that strange insect which emulates a sleeping man's snore ; the cry of the jackal ; the distant hiss of the snake. It was an awful position for the boys.

"Tell you what, young gentlemen," said Sambo: "these here trees grow close togedder—best climb up 'um and sit dere till daylight come. P'r'aps we go on we meet tiger. I'd make fire, but see no sticks, and have no match."

The boys voted his advice again good, especially as the trees were thick, not mere palms, but forest trees of great size and height.

They determined to climb up in them—two in each neighbouring tree—and there watch till dawn; and very soon they were seated on the great branches, and listening in no little anxiety to the noises of the night.

"A tiger can't climb a tree, thank goodness," said Dick to Sambo.

"No, massa, but leopard and bear can, and boa-constrictor too ; but you got gun, I got knife. We keep them off, I 'sure you."

"Sambo, you are a brave fellow," said Dick. "One feels safe with you."

"Ah, massa! You ask Somebody up in Heaven to keep you safe, and He will. Sambo not much good. I hear tell in my country how good man who love God and

negro, was once caught by lion, and knocked down under lion. Lion shook him and bit his arm through, but he pray, and God deliver him from the lion—send men to shoot lion, and good man not dead."

"Tell me a story about lions, Sambo," said Dick, "and then the night won't seem so long."

And Sambo, nothing loth, at once complied.

"Young massa, before I was slave first time, when I was piccaniny, I live close on edge of big forest, in nice hut village there, and village piccaninies always told by mammies not to go inside wood. But black piccaninies always want to do what they ought not."

"And white piccaninies too!" laughed Dick.

"Well," went on Sambo, "one day we all run into wood. We play 'slave-hunter's come;' we must hide; and we go. Well, we run on and run on; but bymby we see hole in rock leading into narrow passage. Good place to hide in dat; so in we run. At end of passage we find big cave, and in it playing like kittens two lion's cubs. First piccaninies very pleased, say, 'We take cubs for pets—make tame—and then they keep wid us, and slave-hunters will be 'fraid to touch us.' But I older: I say we's in lion's den; make haste out. But just den we hear terrible roar—lion hab big voice, not like tiger's growl—and we stare at one anoder wid big eyes, moch frightened. But mouf of de cave very low, only room for lioness and piccaniny to creep through, and big stone lay near. I say, 'Roll stone to mouf of cave, and keep lioness out.' And we were many: we all push; we get it there just in time, for lioness come fast up passage, and roar and beat on stone wid her paws. But stone had slip into hole, and did not move much. And then we rub sticks—many in cave—till make fire come, and we

trow burning sticks trough lilly opening at top of stone. That drive lioness away for little minute. Den she come back, and we hear lion's pit-pat—heavy, heavy too—and his roar, louder than his mate's, and then little cubs make growls to answer them. Then both push gainst stone: it totter——

"Hi! Massa Dick, look dere!" And in a tone of sudden awe he pointed to where a tiger was slowly advancing in the moonlight towards the trees. On it came, a lithe beautiful form, not very large, for it was evidently young, only just out of its cubhood, but full of strength and life. It raised its head above the tall jungle grass, and appeared to inhale the breeze; then, as if aware that it bore the taint of prey on it, came on again, and paused close to their refuge; advanced again, and stopped below the tree in which Harold and Lance were perched, uttering a deep and savage growl, raising his head and looking upwards with glaring eyes. The boys shuddered, and held firmly to their branches.

"Shall we shoot him, Sambo?" asked Lance, who sat easily on his branch, holding on.

"No, Massa Lance, let be; time enough to shoot bymby. He can't get up here nohow; trees wouldn't bear his weight if he could. Wait a bit, we shall see."

The tiger walked restlessly round the tree, growling in a low earnest way. That growl had a terrible meaning.

"I declare, Lance," said Harold, "I would rather die any other death than by becoming a supper for a tiger."

"It isn't a pleasant idea," said the young sailor, "but I trust we will escape it yet; we must sit firmly and hold on well."

Never was a more dreadful trial to boys' courage than that sitting still in the moonlight, gazing down at that

IN THE FOREST.

terrible beast, whose glowing eyes, which shone like rubies, never left his prey; yet they remained thus for what seemed to them an eternity.

At last the tiger lay down at the foot of Sambo's tree; he evidently meant to play a waiting game—he was not in haste. The boys began to despair: if no one came to rescue them, they must ultimately become the food of the tiger. Matters remained thus for more than an hour, when they heard distinctly a rustling in the long grass. The same sound reached the ears of the tiger. He rose, looked round, and seemed to sniff the air in an opposite direction to the tree under which he lay; then in evident alarm sprang forwards in rapid flight. But too late. He had only gone a short distance from the tuft of trees, and gained a more open space, when there rose beside him a monstrous head, a thick dark body, and the amazed and horrified boys saw that a huge snake had attacked him.

"Boa-python!" gasped Sambo, greatly excited.

Yes, it was a monstrous python; they saw it all distinctly in the moonlight. It rose in the air and darted down swiftly on the tiger, which it seized between the shoulders with its huge jaws. The tiger gave a frightful yell and struggled on, dragging its foe with it right out into the open moonlight, where the boys could clearly see this forest tragedy. But the python had suddenly by a strong effort thrown its great coils round the tiger's body, and was crushing him. He rose on his hind legs and tried to shake off the snake, but in vain; the pressure evidently increased, and the tiger fell to the ground. The python then loosed its jaws and let its head fall again on the tiger's skull.

It was an awful sight. The clear moonlight enabled them to watch the dreadful shadow of the two forest

denizens in their struggle. But the tiger had from the first no chance; the great python had him in a hold he would never loose. The yell of the tiger was only once or twice more heard; he had no breath to make a sound in that terrible grip, which was breaking his bones as well as suffocating him.

"Sambo, oh, I am sorry for the tiger," said Dick, feeling sick at the sight and sound; "shall we shoot them both?"

"No, Massa Dick; stay quiet. Snake will swallow tiger bymby. He quite a young beast; not too big for python; but python could swallow ox. Bymby, when he hab swallowed him, he lie gorged—too heavy to move —*then* we shoot him. But now, if Massa Dick shoot, Massa Dick p'r'aps take tiger's place, for not easy to hit moving snake or kill him — he very much live long; climb tree easy."

The boys were really sorry for the tiger, but they saw that they had better act only on the defensive, and they remained quiet and watchful, while yonder the slow process of reducing the python's prey to a pulp, and licking him over with slime, went on; and it was long preparing, that awful feast of the snake.

They were still watching it, for it drew their gaze with a horrible fascination, when Sambo cried again in a voice of greater alarm than before, "Hi, Massa Dick! Look thar." And Dick, following with his eyes the indication of Sambo's finger, saw a red glow at no great distance not at one point only, but at several.

"It's a fire!" cried Dick, "for the light grows brighter and then fades."

"Yes, massa; forest on fire. We must get away at once, massa, and run for our lives."

"But the python—the wild beasts?" said Dick.

"Him mouth full of tiger. Besides, they not harm us in fire, sar."

And he called on the two boys in the neighbouring tree to get down instantly. They stood once more in the long grass, and by Sambo's direction ran as swiftly as they could towards the point which appeared still free from flames; but a forest fire spreads soon and fast; fire creates wind naturally, and the wind drives on the smoke and flames. The writer has seen from afar these forest fires, caused frequently by the natives burning down the trees to make a spot for cultivation, and they look weird and strange on the hill-sides in the night; but to be *in* one!—of all dangers it is the most awful. And the boys struggling breathlessly on, saw one effect of it in the rush of wild animals in the same direction with themselves; bringing the danger of being crushed only, however, for tiger and leopard bounded by them, taking no notice of them; but by-and-bye they heard the tramp of elephants. To get out of the way of the terrified brutes they had often to turn aside, and thus lengthen their way to the stream, towards which, Sambo declared, the instinct of the animals was leading them, and the smoke buried them in its poisonous suffocating cloud at times, and the heat scorched them. It was a deadly race for life!

All too were not equally strong. Lance, clever at climbing, was never a good pedestrian or a swift runner, and by-and-bye he faltered, and could scarcely get on, though luckily their way was downhill.

"Go!" he gasped: "go, dear boys! leave me, and save yourselves."

For reply Sambo threw him over his shoulder, and the boys cried, "No, Lance, we will never leave you!" And

they went on again now, but much less slowly, as Sambo had Lance on his back, and they saw all round them the circle of fire approaching.

The noise alone was affrighting: the crackling of the flames; the screams and cries of the birds and the wild creatures caught in it; and their progress seemed to them even slower than it really was. At length Dick cried out, "The river! the river!" and in another moment they had gained the banks of a stream—not the river they knew, but another affluent of the Brahmaputra. On the banks, on the edge of the stream, in the stream itself, they found tigers, leopards, elephants—even a rhinoceros and trembling deer—all huddling together, their natural instinct of prey and enmity extinguished before the face of the mighty element.

"Git into the water, sars," cried Sambo. "You can swim lilly bit, all of you." And he plunged in, first releasing Lance, who gladly plunged into the river.

It was but a narrow stream, and the flames blew across it at some parts, but only kindled some reeds, that went out soon, on the opposite bank; the stretch of reeds and bulrushes being happily wide there.

The boys and Sambo swam down the stream, helped by the current. They were quite ignorant of the direction of their home, and they therefore thought it wisest to take advantage of the assistance thus gained, and, putting themselves on their backs, they floated. Everywhere by the river they saw the assembled animals, and heard their various cries; from the forest also came the distressing sounds of those which had been overtaken by the flames.

They had been swimming a considerable time. It was now dawn, and they had left the burning forest at some

distance when Sambo turned to the opposite shore, and they followed him to land.

He had seen a labourer at work, and divined that a village must be near. They landed breathless and exhausted, and the boys flung themselves for rest on the ground, while Sambo went up to the labourer and asked him where they could get help. The man did not understand him, but Dick going to his assistance, they ascertained that there was a native village not far off, and they at once proceeded.

It soon came in sight—a really picturesque place on the banks of the stream, which there, in making a curve, ran inland a little way. It was shaded by palms, and there was a small mango tope (or grove) near it. Some cattle were lying down peacefully near the huts, and an Assamese, outside one of them, was talking to a pet monkey.

The boys and Sambo went up to him, and Dick explained how they came there, and asked if they could get breakfast and a conveyance to the Naga plantation. Breakfast they could have, and the owner of the monkey thought he could get them a bullock-cart to take them back.

The lads sat down on the grass, therefore, to breakfast with thankful hearts, and partook of milk, *chupatties* (bread cakes), and bananas with remarkably good appetite. The rich man of the village was a very well-to-do farmer, and on being told of the arrival of some English sahibs escaped from the burning forest, came to them at once, and offered them every assistance. They were at some distance, indeed many miles, from the plantation; but still they hoped to reach it in time, and to relieve the agonizing anxiety of their friends.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RESTORED TO THEIR FRIENDS.

THE anxiety and alarm of the Lovelace family may be imagined, when the dinner hour that day arrived, and the boys did not appear. Inquiries were made in the plantation, and it was ascertained that they had gone out shooting with Brown. This somewhat allayed their anxiety, and they went to dinner expecting that the young sportsmen would come in before it was over. But still they did not come, and Mr. Lovelace was consulting Mr. Dunmore as to what should be done, and if they had not better set out at once in search of them, when Brown, looking pale and scared, entered the hall.

"Mr. Brown," exclaimed his employer angrily, "where are the boys?"

The manager, whose teeth actually chattered with fear, replied that they had gone out shooting with him; that they had lost their way for a moment; that he had begged them, as they were rather fatigued, to remain on the spot with the bags while he ascended a little acclivity to see their road; but that just as he reached the top he heard a shout from them, ran back immediately, and found them gone. He had shouted and called, and searched in every direction, but no trace of them could

be found, and at length, in despair, he had returned to get assistance.

Mr. Lovelace was extremely alarmed and very angry. "How dared you take the young gentlemen into those woods," he asked, "so far, that even you scarcely knew your way back? You knew I had forbidden them to go there."

"No, sir," said the manager, "I knew nothing of the kind; and as Mr. Richard is quite master over me, I obeyed his wishes and went out with him shooting. I was not aware that you had forbidden it."

"Well, there is no time for discussing the matter now," said Mr. Lovelace; "call the shikarries and the clerks and the servants, as many as we need, and show us the way yourself."

A good party was soon collected, well armed with guns and torches, to keep off wild beasts; and they started at once for the forest, dispersing a little, and uttering shouts and cries continually. But to find the lost in a forest is not an easy task; they had taken from the first a wrong direction (thanks to the manager), and they could find no trace of the boys and Sambo.

Had he led them right they would have found Karen's body, and farther on two of the bags of game, which the boys had cast away; indications which would have led them on the right track. But this was not done, and they spent several hours in searching a part of the woods where the boys had never been; but they were at last skirting along in the right direction, when a cry of "fire!" arose, and they beheld the flames in swift pursuit. Had a spark from one of the torches originated the catastrophe?

Mr. Lovelace was in despair; still they pushed on in the right direction, but were met by other flames; and there

was nothing left but to turn off to the left and get out of the wood as soon as possible. For them there was found an outlet, and they gained the open ground in safety, the wind driving the flames the other way.

But in safety themselves, Mr. Lovelace and his friend gazed with anguish on the blazing forest which was, they believed, the grave of the three bright bold lads whom they all loved.

"It is too dreadful!" groaned Mr. Lovelace. "What will my brother say?"

The day dawned on a sad family at the Lovelace house. Beatrice sat weeping bitterly, the boys were like brothers to her; and it was agony to hear little Algy in the hall calling for "Halald."

But Mr. Lovelace and Mr. Dunmore had not given up the search entirely: they would enter the forest as soon as the fire ceased, and at least find the bodies or charred remains of the lost boys; but the fire was not out till sunset of that day, and for some hours the smoke and burning embers would render it impossible for them to penetrate it; so they waited in profound grief.

It was near midnight, and the weary inmates of the Lovelace house were about retiring for the night, when loud cries from the avenue startled them, and the gentlemen and Beatrice at once rushed out with newly awakened hope. Quite a crowd of shouting Coolies was coming towards the house. They opened as they drew near it, and Mr. Lovelace saw a bullock-cart approaching with four persons in it, whom he at once recognized as the boys and the negro.

The rapture with which they were received may be imagined.

"But you are nearly as black as Sambo, Dick!" cried

Beatrice, as they stood in the drawing-room after the first excitement was over.

"I have been smoked," laughed the boy, "so it is not surprising I am a Nocturne in Black, Bee."

And then they had supper, while Mr. Lovelace paid the bullock driver and sent a present to the village.

When they had fed, bathed, and had a good night's rest, Mr. Lovelace, his wife, guest, and daughter heard from the boys the story of their terrible adventure. It made a profound impression on the planter, and a few hours afterwards he discussed it gravely with Mr. Dunmore.

"From the lads' account," he said, "Brown must have taken us in the wrong direction. Is it possible, do you think, that he left them in the forest on purpose? I was struck by his jealous and spiteful tone about Dick, when I reprimanded him for taking the boys into the forest."

"I have the same impression," said Mr. Dunmore, "and I really think that you would do well to get rid of him. Dick, you see, is a formidable rival to him if he ever hoped to be taken as a partner."

"Taken as a partner!" echoed Mr. Lovelace; "absurd! he could never have dreamed of such a thing. However, I shall get rid of him. I must give him, according to our agreement, a quarter's notice; not too long a time for me to find his successor."

And Mr. Lovelace acted on his resolution, and told Mr. Brown that he should expect him to quit his employment that day three months; and Mr. Brown went away from that interview with deadly vengeance in his heart.

Mr. Lovelace spoke seriously to the boys of the danger of their going anywhere without his permission.

"You have gone through deadly peril," he said, "through

acting without it; henceforward you are not to shoot anywhere without my leave."

And they were glad to promise obedience; they had no longer any wish to enter the unexplored forests.

About this time Mr. Lovelace received a visit from a native gentleman, named Purander Sinh; a pleasant courteous Oriental, who listened to the story of the boys' adventure with much interest.

"I have called," he said to Mr. Lovelace, "to ask if you would like to take part in a tiger hunt, which I intend to undertake in a day or two. The other English sahibs—Vivien, Smit', Fitzpat'ick—have accepted my invitation; will you confer this honour?"

Mr. Lovelace would be glad to join, and Mr. Dunmore, to whom the invitation was also extended, gladly accepted the native noble's courtesy.

"He has some splendid elephants," explained Mr. Lovelace afterwards, "and we are to stay at his house, where you will see native life at its best."

"It is just the opportunity I have desired," said Mr. Dunmore, "and I am grateful to you for procuring it for me. You won't take the boys, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; we shall be only guests ourselves. And really, if I could take them I would not—they are always getting into scrapes."

"Out of which they always succeed in pulling themselves, however," laughed Mr. Dunmore.

"Yes, but the pitcher may go too often to the well. I shall leave them to protect the ladies: the trust will quite reconcile them to being left at home."

Preparations were made for their visit, and it must be acknowledged that the boys, who had actually dreamed of hunting tigers on elephants, were disappointed at being

left behind. Mr. Lovelace gave them his promised consolation.

"We shall leave you boys in charge of the ladies and the plantation," he said to Dick and his friends, "and we shall be quite happy, knowing that they are under your protection. Remember, you are bound to take care of yourselves for their sakes."

Harold laughed, and said they would do their best and not seek adventures, but that fate might prove too strong for them. He little thought how true his jesting words would prove.

The boys watched the departure of the hunters with wistful eyes, and, to console themselves, summoned Sambo to tell them the remainder of his adventure in the lion's lair.

They called Beatrice to hear the story also, and the party gathered under the verandah in the midday heat. Beatrice, reclining in an American chair, slowly fanned herself with a feather-fan; the boys threw themselves on the matting; Sambo sat on a low stool, and had to repeat his story from the beginning to the tottering of the stone. Then he went on:

"The stone tottered. Piccaninies made loud cry, when suddenly we hear voice from hole overhead say in our tongue, 'What's matter down there?' Everybody cry out, 'Lion, lion! him eat us,' an' we look up and see man's face at lilly hole in top of cave. He say, 'Push that stone as hard as you can; I go to kill lion.' And soon we hear 'bang! bang!' and lion roar; then again 'bang! bang!' and lioness roar. I think man have hard work outside. But bymby I hear him cry, 'Let go the stone,' and we let go; but it very hard to put back. Not open enough to leave room for man to get in—only room

for small boy to get out. But we little, we keese [squeeze] through, and find brave man outside. He had killed lion and lioness; but lioness had torn his arm, and he much pale, much hurt. We take him home, and village very glad—love him much—wonder much—and listen when he say that his God save him, and he tell us about the Lord Jesus. Sambo, and all piccaninies, and most of village people then baptized. Sambo's real name John," with an air of pride.

"Oh, could his deliverer have been Livingstone?" said Harold. And they asked him; but Sambo could not remember the name of the brave missionary who had fought a lion and a lioness defending their cubs.

Dick, according to his uncle's instructions, walked round the plantation that afternoon: the Coolies were laughing and talking, and sitting about idly in groups. There was, Dick thought, an unusual air of freedom about them. They rose and salaamed when he passed, but resumed their chattering and laughing when he was gone by. Mr. Brown was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Brown sahib?" asked the boy at last of two graver and steadier-looking Coolies.

"Not know, sahib," was the answer; "not see Brown sahib since early morning."

"The manager seems acting on the proverb 'When the cat's away the mouse may play,'" thought Dick, as he returned to the house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BESIEGED.

THE family had dined, and the ladies were proceeding across the hall to the verandah in the court of the fountain, when Harold, who was following them, was stopped by Sambo, who laid his hand on his arm, and looked at him with a "considerably scared" expression, as Dick would have said.

"What is it, Sambo?" he asked.

"Massa," said the negro, "me tink Nagas coming here!"

"The Nagas! Why should they come?" asked Harold, puzzled.

"Massa, for rob, for murder! People tell me they very bad men, very cruel."

And Sambo showed the whites of his eyes in great alarm.

"Who told you so?" asked Harold, rather startled.

"Massa, me see 'em! I walk up hill—you know pretty walk Miss Bee like so much? When I reach top, I lie down to rest, and look over hill. There I see party of Nagas, with guns, and they were creeping up the side of the hill underneath where I lay. They come softly, and send out scouts like people in war. But they not see me, for I turn on side and roll back down hill."

Dick had, in search of Harold, now joined them; he heard Sambo's last speech.

"How far off are they?" he asked.

"About two miles, sar," said Sambo. "They crossing near where river falls from hill."

"I will run and tell my aunt," said Dick.

And hurrying to the verandah, he related Sambo's story to Mrs. Lovelace. She looked very much alarmed.

"We had better get the people in from the godown, Dick," she said, "and then close all the iron shutters your uncle had put up. We must defend ourselves as well as we can, for our fate would be dreadful if we fell into their hands. Run and see if Brown is in the clerks' department, my dear boy."

Dick obeyed her, giving the servants orders first to secure the shutters of the verandah and the upper storey.

He returned in a few moments, accompanied by one of the clerks—his friend Mr. Prince.

"Mr. Brown has not been to the office to-day, madam," he said to Mrs. Lovelace.

"This is alarming news, Mr. Prince," she said. "Is the manager on the plantation?"

"Mr. Richard tells me he has not been there to-day, madam. Perhaps he may have had warning of a threatened descent of the Nagas, and is gone to summon the military."

"I hope so," said the lady; "but we must secure ourselves meantime as well as we can. How many men have we to defend the house?"

"There are thirty men altogether," he said, "including ourselves—I mean we clerks, madam—and we three are Englishmen."

"And we are three English boys," cried Dick, "and Sambo represents Africa."

His aunt smiled.

"Well," she said, "see that the shutters are secured, and bring in the people and the cattle to the fountain court."

Her orders were obeyed. The dark-skinned mothers and little children, with three or four cows and two goats, soon crowded the centre court, where they were in safety, and the servants and Dick pronounced the house fully secured. Why did none of them think of the commissariat?

Mrs. Lovelace then desired them to get together all the arms and ammunition in the house, bringing Mr. Lovelace's rifles and cartridge-boxes out of his dressing-room herself.

The household was assembled. The Bengali servants were pale and scared; the Assamese, who were all upper servants, were cool and collected.

"Lance," said Mrs. Lovelace, "you have had some training on board ship—you must organize our defence. You will all obey Mr. Regan," she added to the servants and clerks; "he is an officer in the navy."

Lance thus placed, as he called it, in command, began to post the garrison. He found they had eight defenders for each side of the house, and two over, one of these being Sambo. He placed four at the two end windows of each side, remaining in command himself, and Dick appearing as his lieutenant.

The men were scarcely at their posts when a yell from outside announced the approach of the enemy. They came on, an eager savage crowd, but paused in some surprise, Lance thought (he was watching them); in front of the house, which they had evidently expected to find open and undefended.

They stood in consultation for a moment, then advanced towards the verandah and entrance.

"Fire!" cried Lance, as they came within range; and the Nagas received the contents of eight rifles, two of their men falling.

By this time Dick had summoned eight more defen-

ders from the back of the square, and opened the two closed windows in front; putting a defensive screen of mattresses and pillows up to them; and when the Nagas once more advanced, sixteen rifles well aimed thinned their ranks. Sambo and Beatrice loaded for the defenders.

The hillmen drew off with wild cries and execrations, carrying five wounded men back with them. They were now out of range, but the boys could distinguish through a telescope that they were in eager consultation; and by-and-bye a man was dragged before them, who was, they thought from his dress, an Englishman.

Of course they could not see his face, or hear what passed between him and the Nagas. That our readers may the better understand our story, we will repeat that which was said.

"Traitor!" said the chief, in his own tongue, which the white man spoke fluently, "what is this? You told us that the sahibs were away—that we should find only women and children in an undefended house. We find an iron fortress, with many men in it who fire well; we have lost five men. Have you brought us into a trap?"

The traitor (he well deserved the name) protested that he was as much surprised as the chief was; that he had believed the house would be undefended, and that it could be taken by surprise; that usually every night the inhabitants slept with open windows, and with their servants unarmed.

"Some one," he said, "must have carried the news of your intentions to Lovelace sahib, and he has returned from Purander Sinh's, he and his friend who never misses his aim. But it is not my fault; I hate the sahib, and I swear to you I would, if I could, kill him with my own hand."

"But what is to be done now?" asked the chief. "We

cannot get into the house without too great a loss; must we retreat?"

"No, no," cried the traitor. "Have I not told you that there is much treasure there, and a beautiful fair English girl, a fit wife for a chief? No, do not retreat; they cannot get out to seek for help from the soldiers. We can starve them out, even. The godown, and the well which supplies their tank, are outside the house, and they cannot have much food in it. Let us go and attack the house at the back, and prevent them from getting provisions."

"If it were not for the treasure and the damsel," said the chief, "I would burn the house, and go back. Now, listen: if we do not take it in a few hours, I will throw your head into the well!"

The traitor shuddered. The chief made a sign of dismissal, and he was led away.

Then the leader directed two of his swiftest followers to go for reinforcements.

Believing that he would meet with no opposition, he had brought only thirty men with him. Now he found he should require a hundred. Meantime, taking the traitor's advice, he marched his followers round to the back of the dwelling.

Lance, who kept his glass on them, observed this manœuvre immediately, and at once summoned those whom he had moved to the front to return to their former position. He had scarcely arranged them at the windows before he saw the Nagas defile beside the high wall of the godown, and ten or twelve of them began to attempt to climb it. But they were received with a sharp fire, under which two men fell; and they drew back.

The chief resolved now that he would wait till the rest of the tribe, or at least the reinforcements he had sent for, should arrive; and the men drew off, bivouacing

in the deserted huts of the godown, and taking what they could find in them.

Thus at about eleven o'clock — for the attack and defence had taken place by moonlight — the enemies appeared to be quiescent, and the boys and Mr. Prince, leaving the two other clerks in charge of the defence, went to tell Mrs. Lovelace the exact state of the case. She heard them with some dismay.

"It is unfortunate that they have left the front," she said, "for there will not be enough flour and rice for all the people in the house, unless we fetch it from the godown; and the enclosure will now be under fire, will it not?"

Mr. Prince said no doubt it would.

"Some one ought to go and summon the soldiers," said Harold.

"But they are twenty miles away!" said Mrs. Lovelace despairingly; "and no one will he able to get out of the house alive."

"Dear aunt," said Dick, "we must risk it. I would say let us try to go and ask help at Mr. Vivien's, but the neighbours would be no match for the Nagas. The soldiers MUST come. Let me go for them."

"YOU, Dick! YOU, who don't know a step of the way!" she cried.

"The young sahib is right, Mem Sahib," said the *kansamah* or butler, respectfully, "we must get help from the soldiers. Richard sahib knows our language as well as the Mem Sahib does: he could pass for a native himself; and if she would give me leave, I would go with him, and show him the way."

"But need two of you go?" she asked, unwilling to risk Dick's safety.

"Two are better than one," said Narak, unconsciously quoting the Wise Man's proverb: "if one falls, the other

goes on. Besides, Master Dick will have greater influence with officer sahibs, who might not believe me, and fear a trap."

"It is my place to go, aunty," said Dick; "so you must say 'Yes,' at once."

"No, Dick," said Harold; "I will go. You stay at home to defend the house."

"Nay, sahib," interposed Narak. "Richard sahib speaks our tongue, and that is needful, for he must go disguised, and he must pass for my son, whom I am taking to a service with the English sahibs."

Mr. Prince now interfered, and volunteered to go himself; but Dick persisted in its being his duty, and at length his aunt yielded. The truth was, she had small hope of deliverance, and thought that the boy might as well have the chance of escape.

Narak took Dick away with him for about a quarter of an hour, and then returned, bringing with him an admirably got-up native boy. Dick looked his assumed part well, having black eyes and hair, and a brunette complexion much darkened by sunburn; Narak had, however, stained his hands and feet.

Then they peeped from the windows from behind the mattrasses, to see if they could discover a safe place of exit. They found that the sentinels (if any had been placed) must be at some little distance from the house, and that the danger would be, not in leaving the dwelling, but the grounds. The adventurers were therefore let out by the front door, and enough of a shutter pushed back to admit of their leaving the verandah; then they both threw themselves on the ground, by Narak's orders, and crawled thus to the shelter of a near hedge of jessamine. Their friends, who watched them from the barricaded windows, breathed more freely when they saw them disappear in the jessamine, for they knew that in

it they might get along unseen to the orange groves. The remainder of the night passed without any further attempt on the house by the Nagas. The fact was, they had several wounded to attend to, and being certain of the good aim and courage of the defenders, they deemed it best to wait till their reinforcements came up, and they could attack the house on all sides at once.

Still, the defenders were compelled to watch in turn, and could only sleep at their posts while their companions kept guard. Even the ladies feared to go to bed. Algy alone slept while the voices of their savage enemies were heard without the house.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEFENCE.

THE dawn found the little garrison weary and irritated by the heat of the shut-up house, and their long and anxious watch. Breakfast was got by the servants for all; the defenders taking it at their posts. After breakfast Mrs. Lovelace called Lance to her.

"The servants tell me," she said, "that there is barely enough rice and flour in the house for the day, and the ammunition is diminishing fast; yet I think we can wait a day for a supply of that. But don't you think it would be wise to get in some rich and flour from the godown before the attack begins again, which doubtless it will soon?"

Lance agreed with her, and said, "I will go to the stores myself."

"No, my dear lad," said the lady, "one of the men must go; you cannot be spared from your post. Go and ask who will volunteer."

Lance obeyed her silently, and gave her message to the defenders. Sambo gave no one time to speak.

"Massa," he said, "me not shoot well—not hit Naga: me go for food to godown."

A murmur of applause followed his words: he could really be best spared of them all.

He instantly went off to procure baskets, etc., and was

soon ready with a huge *borer's* (pedlar's) basket fastened on his back.

The back door was opened enough to allow of his egress, and from the windows the points of eight rifles projected to threaten the besiegers, and defend him on the way. He issued forth, and then ran at full speed to the godown; but he was pursued by a shower of bullets, which, however, did him no harm. The Nagas during the night had thrown up a bank outside the wall, out of range of the windows, from which they commanded the enclosure.

Sambo, once in the storehouse of the godown, found that he was safe—the place was fireproof. He filled the basket with bags of flour and rice, and other bags—one of coffee, one of maize—to hang on his arms. Then he raised the great *borer's* basket on his head. Nearly flat when empty, it was now swollen to a great size, the soft basketwork stretching as required. Thus accoutred, the negro issued out into the godown, under a heavy fire from both sides of the enclosure. The distance from the house, however, was not great, and Sambo ran at his best speed. But just as he reached the door, a shot pierced the basket on his head, and he was nearly blinded by a shower of flour and rice. He managed, however, to enter the house, the door of which Benedetta held ajar, and there he breathlessly put his basket down. Much was lost, but there was enough left for their present requirements.

The Nagas again assailed the house about noon, but the steady fire of the defenders drove them off once more. They managed, however, to hit one of the Assamese sevants, and the man fell wounded. He was carried to the nearest room, and the ladies did their best to help him. Luckily the ball had passed through the upper part of his shoulder, and had not remained in. It was

a mere flesh wound, which they could dress and bind up. Mrs. Lovelace, while in England, had received a little instruction from the St. John's Ambulance Society, and now found her knowledge inestimable.

There were continuous attacks at short intervals all day; but only at one point—at the back. Still the defenders of the enclosure dared not leave their posts, and the defence had become a desperate one.

The second night was troubled and disturbed. Again and again the Nagas endeavoured to break through the defences and get into the enclosure; again and again they were driven back. Towards morning they drew off, wearied, with at least a dozen wounded: their full reinforcements had not yet arrived.

Towards dawn Lance and Harold looked so worn out that Mr. Prince insisted on their lying down and getting some sleep.

"We have all had rest," he said, "but you two young gentlemen; you *must* get some sleep now: we will guard the house carefully while you lie down."

And the exhausted lads consented to do so, each at his own post near the window he defended. Their heads scarcely touched the soft pillows placed on the floor, before they slumbered profoundly.

Mr. Prince found, an hour afterwards, that the ammunition was getting low. The gunpowder was stored underground at the back of the store, in flannel bags placed in iron casks, and the cellar was never entered except by Mr. Lovelace himself. The danger of fetching it in now, and bringing it through the open under fire, may be conceived; yet it must be done. More food would also have to be brought.

Mrs. Lovelace clasped her hands despairingly when the clerk told her this, and said she left it to Mr. Prince to decide what ought to be done after consulting Lance.

The young clerk, looking very pale and anxious, went back to the chamber in which Lance slumbered, Beatrice following him. On entering the room she saw three men with rifles at the window and Lance asleep on the floor looking pale and worn even in slumber.

"Have they all breakfasted?" she asked Mr. Prince, in a whisper.

"Yes, Miss Beatrice; but there is not enough flour or rice for another meal, I am sorry to say. You see, there are many mouths to feed with all those families from the godown in the house, and Sambo lost nearly half his flour and rice by the shot which pierced his basket; besides, we shall be without cartridges very soon. I *must* wake Mr. Regan."

"I will wake him," said Beatrice. She bent down and whispered, "Lance." He sprang up immediately, wide awake—a sailor is easily roused.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Mr. Prince explained.

"We wake you, sir," he said, "by Mrs. Lovelace's desire." And then he told Lance what was required—food and ammunition.

"But, Lance," said Beatrice, eagerly, "don't you think we might wait, before venturing out again? Succour *must* come soon."

Mr. Prince shook his head.

"It is a dangerous journey and a long one, on foot, to the barracks," he said, doubtfully. "It is a chance if they reach it."

Beatrice turned pale.

"But we must be helped at last," she said; "my father will return soon."

"To be met by the Nagas," said Mr. Prince. "Surely we cannot wish that. The help we require is that of the soldiers."

BEATRICE AND LANCE RUNNING TO THE GODOWN.

"Yes," said Lance; "and, besides, we might wait for food, but we cannot wait for ammunition."

"Lance, don't you think that if two went to the godown, one for food and the other for ammunition, it would save the necessity for another journey till we are relieved?" asked Beatrice.

"Yes," he said, doubtfully; "but we have a wounded man; Sambo is not much of a shot; and we can scarcely spare two, who might one, or both, be killed. No, Bee; this time *I* mean to go: one can't send that poor nigger every time; and, besides, he is not as fleet of foot as I am."

"If you would allow me to go——" said Mr. Prince.

"No," decided Lance, "not this time; you shall go next. And the sooner I'm off the better, for those rascals are quiet just now. If they see me, you must cover me by firing at them, Prince."

And Lancelot hurried down to the hall, and had soon "lashed," as he called it, a large box, which he covered with blankets, on his back.

"I shall fill this with powder and shot," he said, "and these small baskets with coffee and sugar for the ladies. In the other hand I can manage a bag of rice. I must run back for more food when the powder is safe."

This was said to Benedetta, who was assisting him in his preparations; but Beatrice overheard it. He was soon ready, and issued from the back door into the enclosure; but as he darted onward at full speed—for the Nagas instantly fired at him—a light form dashed past him, and on gaining the door of the godown he found Beatrice there before him.

Lance gave a cry of dismay as he opened the door and pushed her in.

"Good Heaven, Bee!" he said, "how came you here?"

"By the way you did," she gasped; "but, oh, Lance, that noise! Lance, am I shot?"

And she gazed down anxiously at her arms and feet.

"No; but it is a wonder you were not," he said. "It's a shame of you to have done such a thing: girls have no business to run such a risk."

"Oh, yes, they have," said Bee, nodding her head at him; "when they are greatly required. Don't you see that *two* can do more than one?—that we shall get double at one time, and that one at least is pretty sure to escape being shot, going back, and so will carry food to the rest? I know you can't spare two at a time from the defence of the house, so I thought I would creep out after you, and prevent your second journey. Why, Lance, I was close behind you all the time!" And she laughed merrily. "But come," she said, "let us make haste and fill our baskets."

And Lance was surprised to find that she knew far better than he did what was best to take.

She told him to get up the powder from the underground room, while she opened a closet with a key she had secured from her stepfather's room, and filled a basket with lids, full of tin canisters. Then they began packing food, and the quantity of tea, coffee, sugar, biscuits, and potted meats which she put in her pockets or in her baskets was wonderful. She made Lance lift a bag of rice on her head and a bag of flour on her back, "as armour," she said; and she helped him to lift on his back his own heavier burden. When this was done they stood for an instant and looked at each other.

"You won't be able to run with that weight," he declared anxiously.

"I don't mean to run. I mean to creep back flat against the wall, but as fast as I can; that is wiser than running through the open as Sambo did," she said.

Lance agreed that it would be best, and the pair started with their loads, creeping round by the wall as fast as they

possibly could; and though the firing began at once, and Beatrice's bag of rice was shot through and she was under a shower of it as she proceeded, they escaped safely, with a larger and better chosen quantity of provisions than Sambo had brought.

Lance begged Mrs. Lovelace to scold Beatrice for her escapade, but she only smiled, with tears in her eyes.

"We women must run risks as well as you," she said, "till help comes; the men are all needed at the windows."

"But can you believe it?" said Lance to Harold afterwards. "There is an iron closet in the godown with cartridges in it, and that girl packed a basket of them without my knowing what she was getting, and carried it on her arm to the house. Imagine! the rice-bag on her head was hit; she might have been blown to atoms."

"I never said, as Dick used to say, that girls were no use in the world," laughed Harold; "if I had I must have contradicted it now. Bee's a brave girl!"

But it seemed likely that this exploit might prove the last with respect to the godown, as the fire of the Nagas on the house, aiming at every window incessantly as they did, rendered the temporary loss of even a single rifle serious.

The ladies were most useful loading for their defenders, and a new mode of warfare occurred to the Italian nurse.

The Nagas—whose numbers constantly increased—were waxing impatient, and a serious assault was made on the iron shutters with crowbars and heavy cudgels, in spite of the telling fire of the defenders, another of whom, a Bengali, was wounded. Whilst this assault was taking place, ten or twelve wild hillmen took advantage of the defenders being drawn nearly all to the same spot, to climb the verandah in hopes of finding an entrance by one of the shuttered and undefended windows; but Benedetta, who was "on guard," as she called it, as soon as she perceived the dark heads rising above the edge of the

verandah roof, called to the *ayah* for a kettle of boiling water which she had already prepared on the charcoal-basket, and the moment Naga approached the window, he received the scalding deluge on his head and shoulders. Meantime the *ayah's* cries brought Harold and two of the servants to the spot, and the men who had paused, startled by their comrade's fate, received a volley of rifle-shot, and drew off.

But the situation grew hourly more perilous: the Nagas probably feared the arrival of succours, and meant to sacrifice lives, in order to make a more rapid conquest of the house.

They had been exceptionally prudent at first, but now they exhibited great bravery, advancing again and again to the assault. They put up ladders also, and many got upon the verandah, but the fire of the defenders made them repeatedly retreat with loss.

Meantime the besieged waited and watched hour by hour for the arrival of succour, and Beatrice, between tears and smiles—for the brave girl tried all she could to keep up their spirits—assured Lance that she had never before fully sympathized with sister Anne, and with Fatima's anxious question, "Do you see anybody coming?"

Alas! they had not even false hopes given them; for nothing was to be seen, when any one did venture to peep from a window, but the wild hillmen who gathered round, guarding every side of the house, and firing incessantly at the windows. Oh, how endless those moments seemed! Algy alone was fearless and ignorant of their danger. He was delighted at having the native children to play with, and used to pretend to be fighting against the hillmen himself — threatening the little Assamese with his toy gun, from which at first they fled terrified. To him the noise and general confusion was only fun.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE FOREST.

AND what, meantime, had become of the seekers for aid? By many windings and turnings they eluded the notice of the besiegers, and gained the woods in safety. Then they breathed freely for the first time, for they had had many narrow escapes. They had been separated from their foes at one time by the merest screen of leaves; at another they had been hidden amongst the thick grass close to the Nagas' passing footsteps. Every inch of the way had been full of peril.

It was still night when they plunged into the woods; but even there they heard sounds which told them the Nagas were near them. Most probably, Narak thought, they were guarding the way to the military station, lest any one should run for aid thither.

"We must avoid them," he said, "by going in the opposite direction — straight to the river, and then doubling back, Richard sahib. It will make it a long way round, but we cannot otherwise escape them."

And instead of going direct towards the military station, they turned down to the river, an almost opposite direction.

Their journey through the woods to the stream would have been a nervous one even for the bravest men, for in that direction the wild animals went to drink; and though in these woods tigers were not rife, there was

sometimes a stray one shot there, and bears and leopards or panthers were known to still inhabit its depths.

"The python will not generally attack men," said the Assamese: "that rustle we heard was probably one escaping from our notice. But keep out farther from the trees, Richard sahib, for the leopard often sits on one of the lower boughs, and drops on the unlucky deer or man who passes."

Richard not only obeyed him, but held his gun in readiness. However, no wild beast appeared till they reached the river, and then they beheld, from a well-chosen hiding-place, the return of a panther, and a little afterwards a bear, from the stream. Richard longed to have a shot at them, but wisely refrained, lest the sound should guide the watching hillmen to them. The river had now to be crossed, in accordance with Narak's plans.

"Can you swim, sahib?" asked the Assamese.

"Yes, I can swim well," was the reply.

"Then let us swim across, and retrace our route by the other bank. This is a branch of the Kupili, and there are no crocodiles in it."

They put their clothes in a bundle and tied them on their heads, and then boldly entered the steam.

The current helped them for a time, but had to be resisted at last, in order to cross to the opposite shore, which they reached rather exhausted. Here they sat down, and Narak drew from a knapsack he wore some sandwiches and wine in a small flask for Dick: his own food was simply bread and rice-cakes. The Assamese are of the Hindoo faith. Dick was very hungry, and was glad to eat, though it was only just dawn.

Then they resumed their outer garments, and went on their way. The woods were now alive with sounds of the caw of crows and rooks, the scream of the parrots,

and the buzz of insects; and again Dick saw that strange curling up of the dew in clouds of white mist peculiar to the country. But just then he had no eyes for the beauty of the scenery. They pressed onwards. There were no paths, but Narak seemed to know his way, and guided Dick onwards without fear. Only once they heard a startled animal fly away from them, and Dick caught a glimpse of a retreating rhinoceros.

And now the sun had gained the meridian, and the closeness in the shut-in portions of the wood was great; while in the more open the sun poured fiercely down on the heads of the travellers. Dick was parched with thirst, but no spring was near, and they had left the river far behind them.

It was a fearfully exhausting walk, and they had to rest for half an hour before they could proceed. At last a native village appeared; but Narak would only linger there just to drink a little milk brought to them by a kind-looking old woman, for which Dick was thankful, and to accept a roll of hard bread, which they ate on their way. The dwellers in this place were unable, had they been willing, to aid the besieged family; so the journeyers had to still press onward.

At length towards sunset they gained the open country, when suddenly, on turning round the side of a hillock, they found themselves face to face with a party of ten or twelve armed hillmen—"savage-looking fellows," Dick thought them.

"Whence come you?" asked one of the band of Narak, crossing and impeding their way, "and who are you?"

"I am of Guahâti," said Narak, calmly. "I serve the Chief Commissioner Sahib. This is my son. We are both from Guahâti, but have lost our way in the woods. I go to place my son with the English sahibs at the next town."

"Are you his son?" asked the Naga, looking searchingly at Dick.

Dick was thankful that he could answer in the same tongue, though he felt reluctant to imply an untruth; but he said, "He has adopted me," which was true (for the time), and a sufficient answer to an Oriental.

"You do not look like an Assamese," said the Naga. "I thought you were not his own son. You must give up your rifle, boy, and you your money, if you have any," he added to Narak.

Narak placed his purse submissively in the Naga's hand, and Dick, with great reluctance, gave his rifle.

"Bind their hands," added the chief; and their hands were bound behind their backs.

Dick gave Narak a look of agony—"What would become of their friends?" it asked. But Narak placed his finger on his lips, and said softly, "Patience, my son."

The Nagas then made them turn and accompany them, and the unlucky travellers had to retrace their steps. As they went on, Narak whispered, "Escape if you can, sahib; never mind me."

But Dick shook his head. To leave Narak thus would be to doom him to death. The boy felt very miserable and hopeless, but determined to watch carefully for an opportunity of escape for both.

They had now re-entered the village just left, and the kind woman who had given Dick milk, made gestures of pity and sympathy when she saw him thus brought back. Meantime the whole population turned out in dismay at the sight of the formidable hillmen, who would, they well knew, clear their village of its stores of rice, and probably drive off their cattle.

The Nagas saw the old woman's look, and their leader asked her if she knew who the prisoners were.

"No," she replied, submissively. "They had passed

through the village since noon, on their road from Guahâti to the cantonments; that was all she knew."

Narak was glad to have her thus confirm his account, by repeating that which he had told her at noon. Meantime the Nagas whispered amongst themselves, and then, in a few minutes, a raid was commenced on the village stores, and in the midst of much weeping and wailing from the inhabitants, the Nagas loaded themselves with booty.

"It is well for you," said the leader to the old woman, "that we have work on hand which will prevent our taking your cattle. We must come another time for them."

And with this agreeable promise he turned away, and ordered his men to march on and bring the prisoners. They re-entered the woods, and it became evident to Narak, from the course they took, that their journey was directed to Mr. Lovelace's plantation.

They stopped, after proceeding for two or three hours, to rest; but by that time—having taken a shorter cut—they were not very far off Dick's home, to which he seemed about to be returned. But on the banks of the upper portion of the stream they paused, and again consulted together.

The fact was that they were unwilling to take the prisoners farther. The old village woman, though she had but repeated what Narak had told her, had made them inclined to believe his statement. If Narak and his son were servants of the Chief Commissioner, it would not do to let them be witnesses of the plunder of the tea plantation. One of the hillmen proposed shooting them; but the leader hesitated: he did not know how far his chief meant to defy the English, and he did not wish to go beyond his (the chief's) will. It was doubtless, Dick thought afterwards, Divine Providence

that interfered in their behalf, and caused the Nagas to refrain from causeless bloodshed. Their consultation ended, the party dividing, nine men went on across the river. Three remained with the captives, whom they desired to sit down under the trees, while they produced their pipes, and seating themselves near Narak and Dick, began to smoke at their ease. By-and-bye one of them got up and strolled into the thicket: he came back with flashing eyes, and spoke eagerly to his companions. They nodded their reply.

Meantime poor Dick, miserable and disappointed as he was, fell into a heavy sleep, his head falling on Narak's shoulder. He had had no sleep the previous night, and had been on his feet very nearly twenty-four hours. The boy was thoroughly exhausted: he slept for some hours, the kind-hearted servant not attempting to disturb him till he was compelled. Then he whispered in the lad's ear,

"Wake up, Richard sahib!"

And the boy gradually and with difficulty roused himself. "What is it, Narak?" he asked.

"We are alone, sahib. The Nagas have found out that there is a rhinoceros in the wood, and they are gone to try to shoot it. I heard all they said; the one who went away first spied it out in the wood. They knew that it would go down to the river to drink, and they are gone to shoot it if possible; but they will not be back soon—that game is not easily killed," with a chuckle. "You know, sahib, the horn is very sacred and of great virtue, so naturally they desire to get it. They thought us both asleep. Our hands are tied, and they put a string from the tree round my ankle, but I have managed to get it off. Would you be afraid to try to escape? You know, if they catch us again they will shoot us."

"Oh, no, we must risk it," exclaimed Dick, rising: "only

think what peril our friends are in! Have I slept very long?"

"Yes, sahib, it is past midnight," said Narak; "you have slept for four hours, I believe. But I had no cause to wake you before."

Their hands were still bound, but that did not hinder them from walking, and they hastened to plunge into the wood again. But their progress, which Narak guided in a contrary direction to that which they had traversed originally, was very slow. They needed their hands sorely to push aside the underwood, and were sometimes obliged to lie flat and wriggle like snakes under obstructions they could not otherwise get through, to their own great peril from cobras and other venomous serpents. Still they made way, and at last Narak ventured to pause, and said,

"If you will stand in front, sahib, I will try to unfasten your hands with my teeth and toes."

Our readers must remember that the Hindoos can use their feet as we do our hands, when they like; the writer has often seen them pick up things from the floor with their toes. And Narak, whose feet had never been deformed by tight boots, proved equal to the occasion. Dick bent down or rose up as he was directed; and finally the knot was untied and the string fell off. Dick then speedily released his guide's hands also. How thankful they were for their recovered power! But they were going—purposely—miles out of their way to elude their probable pursuers, doubling and winding always down into the valley.

Occasionally they fancied that they heard sounds of pursuit, and then hurried on again with redoubled speed, but the pursuers did not follow their direction long.

They at last found themselves in comparative safety, but far away (even farther than they had been when they

started), from the barracks. They had reached, however, human habitations: some pretty mud huts, overshadowed by banana-trees, in the valley; here, as the day was now advanced, they asked hospitality, informing the frightened people, at the same time, of the near neighbourhood of the Nagas. Of course the peasants were instantly as anxious to call in military aid as Dick was, and one of the men offered, as soon as they had had some much-needed food, to conduct them by the nearest way to the cantonments. His offer was gladly accepted, and once more they set out; avoiding, this time, the proximity of the woods.

It was long past noon when they started, and Dick's impatience became extreme; but as no horse, or other conveyance, could be procured at the huts, they had still to press on, on foot. His feet were so swollen now that he could hardly walk. Oh, those long weary miles! How long afterwards he remembered them!

They began at last gradually to ascend the hills; their road was bordered once more by jungle, and not quite without peril, for the moon had again risen; moreover, both were so weary that they made but slow progress. It was long past midnight before they saw the grey cantonments of the British gleaming in the silvery light. The sight gave them strength to hasten a little, but the sentinel's warning, "Who goes there?" was answered only by Dick's staggering forward and falling fainting at his feet.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RELIEVED.

THE besieged could get no sleep the second night of the attack; the assaults were kept up continually. The Nagas had evidently been still further reinforced, and could attack the house on all sides. The defenders had to scatter as much as possible, and Beatrice and Mrs. Lovelace learned to fire a rifle, resting it on the window-sill, in order to make two more active belligerents, while Benedetta and the *ayah* loaded for them; but they had not a minute's rest.

The aching eyes of the unlucky family greeted thankfully the first peep of day, and Beatrice had just said, "Here comes the blessed daylight," when the sound of approaching horsemen broke on their ears. The noise of galloping was followed by a trumpet call—"to charge," if they could have understood it—and the next moment Beatrice cried from her loophole,

"The soldiers! the cavalry! We are saved!"

But the Nagas were not to be easily driven off their prey; they were as brave as any men, and they faced the cavalry with wonderful courage, pouring on them a fusillade which emptied two or three saddles. But the weight and coolness of the English horsemen told: they rode over the hill tribe, and cut them down on all sides. It was an awful scene on which the lookers-on from the house windows gazed. Beatrice and her mother soon turned

away from it, but the "garrison," as they called themselves, aided their friends by firing incessantly on the rear of the hillmen; and the cheer was mutual when at last the chief called off his defeated tribe, and, still fighting, they retreated towards the upper part of the hill.

The soldiers did not pursue them very far: the tribe would have to receive a lesson hereafter, but just then the English were too few for pursuit. The trumpets sounded the *assemblée*, the doors of the house were at once opened, and the wounded men brought in. One trooper had been killed, three wounded. They were taken into Mr. Lovelace's study and placed upon extemporized beds, while their doctor, who had ridden to the fray with them, attended to them at once, and afterwards to the wounded servants. The fallen Nagas who remained on the ground were taken to the offices of the household, and cared for, by the kindly doctor, after the soldiers and servants.

Mrs. Lovelace and Beatrice meantime had met the officers in the hall, and after a few words of warm thanks, asked anxiously after Dick, whom they did not see.

"He is safe in bed at the barracks," replied Captain Sefton. "The poor lad was utterly exhausted: he had walked, with only a few hours' sleep, ever since he left you, and we insisted on his remaining in bed till we return. The Assamese gives a wonderful account of their hair-breadth escapes — they were actually made prisoners by the Nagas, but they got away. Your nephew is a young hero."

Harold, Lance, and the clerks soon made their appearance also, and received no little praise from the soldiers for their gallant defence of the house. All had much to tell, but they were glad to be interrupted at last by a summons to "tiffin." The Nagas had left two or three roosters behind them, and these the servants had sacrificed to the great need of the family, as well as a sheep.

Every one enjoyed a good meal, and little Algy was eloquent in his delight at getting "nice fowl" again to eat, and at everybody looking "comfy," as he called it; though he asked eagerly why Dick didn't "tum."

"He will be here very soon," laughed Captain Sefton, "and then he will have a nice story to tell you, little man."

Tiffin was not over when a sound of confused cries and advancing footsteps reached them. Mrs. Lovelace looked up startled, and Captain Sefton and his lieutenant hastily rose.

"There is something wrong," said the former. "The ladies will excuse us." And the officers hurried from the room, followed by Lance and Harold.

In the hall they saw a crowd of Coolies carrying in a stretcher of boughs, on which lay a blood-stained form. Beside it walked Dick; following it was Mr. Vivien, accompanied by some of his friends the planters. Lance rushed forward—his pale face and questioning eyes asked the meaning of what he saw.

"Yes," said Mr. Dunmore, sadly, "we came across a body of Nagas, and poor Mr. Lovelace is shot."

They bore the wounded gentleman into the drawing-room, and summoned Dr. Linton, while Mr. Dunmore proceeded to break the sad news to Mrs. Lovelace and her daughter. They did not wait to hear his full explanation, but rushed off immediately to the beloved sufferer. We will tell our readers how this evil chance happened.

The Coolies had fled at once, as Mr. Prince said they would, when they heard of the descent of the hillmen, and had scattered for hiding and shelter in various directions. One of them, however, had at last summoned courage to go into the open, and try to find his master at the house of the Nabob. He had reached it only that

morning, and Mr. Lovelace had been frantic at his long-delayed news.

He had instantly ordered his horses and servants. Mr. Smith had sent off to give the alarm to his nearest neighbours, and resolving to seek the aid of the military at once, had proposed their first riding to the cantonments. But Mr. Lovelace would not hear of such delay: he must go himself immediately to share the danger of his family. The gentlemen, finding they could not persuade him to more prudent measures, would not let him go alone. They mustered their shikarries; the native noble lent his armed retainers; and the little party set off on their heroic attempt at rescue. They reached the neighbourhood of the house only to see the Nagas retreating; but coming across the body still in the rear, Mr. Lovelace had dashed forward and fired at them. His shot was returned with fatal effect, and he fell. The Nagas hurried their retreat, and soon afterwards some of the English cavalrymen returning from the pursuit came up. The soldiers at once made a bier of boughs, covered it with cloaks, and sadly bore the wounded gentleman to his home.

The scene in the drawing-room was most distressing. The wife and daughter kneeled by the dying man—for the doctor had declared the wound mortal—and bathed his hands with their tears. Dick, who had—in spite of Captain Sefton's orders — soon rested sufficiently, had borrowed two horses of the sympathizing young officers, and with Narak and an escort of two soldiers, had ridden as fast as he could to be in time for the encounter he knew would shortly take place, but he came too late.

At the entrance to the avenue he met the mournful procession bearing his wounded uncle, and, in bitter sorrow, he alighted, and walked beside him to the house. The poor boy now wept as passionately as his aunt and

Beatrice, while Harold and Lance stood close beside him in silent sympathy. The officers, Mr. Dunmore, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Vivien, stood in a mournful group at the window.

Mr. Lovelace was conscious; his eyes were fixed tenderly on his wife, but he had not yet spoken. Suddenly, in a hoarse tone—alas! how unlike his usual pleasant voice—he said, "Dick."

The weeping boy bent over him.

"Be a son to——" Mr. Lovelace gasped feebly, pointing to his wife.

"I will, I will!" sobbed the boy.

There was a lengthened silence; then once more he spoke. "God bless you!" he said, and sighed deeply.

The doctor took his hand; again silence followed, broken only by the sobs of the women. Mr. Lovelace had closed his eyes. Once more he opened them, looked at his wife, and smiled; then the light of life passed out of them, with one more long sigh.

Dr. Linton laid down the hand he was holding.

"It is all over," he said; "he is dead."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PROSPECTS MARRED.

THE grief of the family and friends of Mr. Lovelace for his untimely end was profound and sincere. He had been so good and kind to everybody. Dick loved him as a father, and sorrowed for him as one, and the boys sympathized with him deeply.

The pleasant house, full before of young voices and happy laughter, was now hushed and quiet. Even wee Algy knew something sad had happened, played quietly, and looked sorrowful. It was the first time the three boys had come across the grim spectre, whose presence they could scarcely yet realize, and they were awed, and full of thought. Mr. Dunmore took the opportunity of speaking to them of that future life, of which boys think too little, telling them that Mr. Lovelace had gone to a happier and brighter home. But it is very hard for youth to realize the Christian's hope. Life *here* seems enough when it is so new and bright.

The funeral took place the next morning early. They laid Mr. Lovelace in the little cemetery round the iron church, where the missionary, whom he had supported by every means in his power, ministered; and the sorrowing Beatrice laid a large wreath of calamata flowers and stephanotis on his grave.

Then they returned to the house that was to them desolate. Mr. Lovelace left a will; but it had been made before

Dick joined him. Another, about which he had instructed his lawyer at Calcutta after their shipwreck (in which he lost a second one made in England), was not signed. He had deferred it too late! Consequently, Dick's name did not appear in it. The planter left his fortune to his wife, except a very handsome legacy to his brother, Dr. Lovelace; the plantation he willed should be sold: he thought it impossible that a lady could manage it. Thus Dick's prospects were suddenly blighted, and he would have to return home. Certainly this added to the lad's sorrow, though he felt ashamed to own even to himself that he could have selfish regrets at such a time.

Meantime, while the women and his friend mourned sincerely for the generous kindly man who had been so suddenly taken from them, the Chief Commissioner had gathered a sufficient force to chastise the Naga tribe smartly.

The Nagas had to make a humble submission, and at an interview between their defeated chief and the colonel in command, a curious fact was discovered. The Naga chief, on a sum in compensation for mischief done being demanded of him, with some dignity declared that he had been ill used; that Mr. Lovelace's agent had encroached largely on the land of the tribe, and that Mr. Lovelace had refused (with insults) to pay for the portion taken. Here Mr. Dunmore, who was at the conference, interfered. He said he knew that Mr. Lovelace had been displeased with his agent for having taken the land, and that he believed it had been paid for. Mr. Lovelace's nephew Richard would know, however, as well as his manager. Dick was therefore sent for at once, and also Mr. Brown, and the conference was adjourned to the next day.

The next day brought Richard, but not Brown, who could not be found. Dick, however, at once asserted that his uncle had desired Brown to find out from the

Naga chief what sum he required for the land, "and Brown did go up the hills to find out," added Dick, "for I remember I wanted to go with him, but my uncle would not let me. Brown, when he came back, named 'a great sum,' my uncle said; however, to keep peace and live in safety, as he told me, he sent Brown up with the money, and he brought the chief's receipt. It will be found in my uncle's desk."

The chief listened to the translation of Dick's speech with a heavy frown. He had lost all this money, for he declared (truly) that Brown had come to meet him at a spot fixed on by both, near the plantation; that he had declared Mr. Lovelace refused to pay anything for the land, and had desired him to tell the chief so, with insults which he (Brown) dared not repeat. That when, enraged, the chief vowed vengeance, Brown gave him his hand, and told him that he would help him to get it—that he, too, had been injured by Lovelace sahib, and that they would make him suffer for it.

"He told me," the chief said, "that he had always expected; had been almost promised, a partnership with Lovelace sahib, but that suddenly he had brought back a boy to put in his place, and he would be avenged. It was he who told me of the treasure of gold and silver and jewels in the sahib's house, and persuaded me to go and take it while the sahib was away, and only women and boys at home. But we found the boys and women could keep us at bay till the soldiers came to slay us!" viciously.

This speech was translated to Mr. Dunmore.

"What a villain!" he said, "Tell the chief that the money *was* sent to him by Brown. Brown must have kept if for himself, and probably hoped that if the house were taken, he could secure the receipt; or that if the chief were shot on account of his raid, it would answer the same end—that is, conceal his theft."

The chief expressed a deadly animosity against this man, who had deceived and robbed him, and regret at the death of Mr. Lovelace.

The matter was settled by a promise of payment for the land at a quarter of the price demanded; and the chief was glad to accept this compromise, and to enter into a treaty with the English colonel, solemnly pledging himself never again to molest the Anglo-Indian settlers.

It was the second day after the settlement of the Naga difficulty. They were sitting under the verandah after dinner, talking of the past and of the future, when a servant appeared and announced that the Naga chief had sent a basket containing a gift for Mrs. Lovelace, which he begged her to accept, with the usual high-flown Oriental compliments. The lady desired that the offering might be brought in, and begged Dick to open it. He did so, and let it fall with a cry of horror: from it rolled, nearly to Mrs. Lovelace's feet—a ghastly head! She screamed, and rose. Beatrice flew to her side; Mr. Dunmore bent over the dreadful gift.

"It is the head of Brown the manager," he said; "this is the Nagas' vengeance!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEMESIS.

THERE came to Lance from Calcutta a letter from his father, summoning him to join him at once. There came also another for Mr. Dunmore, telling him that Captain Elliot had succeeded in buying him a new yacht, called the *Flying Fish*, and that it had started for Calcutta.

It became absolutely imperative on Lance to say farewell to his friends, and Mr. Dunmore proposed to Mrs. Lovelace that they should all go to Calcutta together.

Mr. Vivien had confided to Mrs. Lovelace the secret of his love for Beatrice, and his intention to go to England by-and-bye and ask her to become his wife: he offered now to oversee the March tea-gathering on the Lovelace plantation himself, if the estate were not sold previously, which was scarcely likely; therefore Mrs. Lovelace was free to return to England.

Once more they sailed down the grand Brahmaputra; once more they landed at Calcutta. They found that the *Conqueror*, Captain Regan's ship, had arrived, and Lance was soon shaking hands with his father.

Captain Regan told Mr. Dunmore that he had been of course greatly delighted at learning that Lance was still living, and that he did not think the loss of time would signify to him.

Mr. Dunmore spoke warmly of Lance, telling his father of the skill and courage with which he had defended Mr.

Lovelace's house, an account of which he had sent to the *Times*, chiefly for the boy's sake; therefore Lance had probably gained in reputation what he might have lost in sea time.

Harold and Dick parted from the young midshipman with great regret.

"The threefold cord is broken," said Dick, sorrowfully. "When shall we three meet again?"

"That question was sent to me once as a valentine," laughed Lance. "Two donkeys mournfully stared at me from the page, and under them were the words, 'When shall we three meet again?'"

The boys laughed.

"Donkeys or no donkeys," said Dick, "I hope it will be soon."

The new yacht arrived in due time at Calcutta, and the same party (with two omissions, alas!) embarked in her for England. The voyage was quite without adventures of any kind, and they all landed safely in their own country.

The Lovelaces proceeded to Pengarven; they intended to stay for a year at least with the doctor's family, and Mr. Dunmore decided also to go to his home in Cornwall. It was a pretty and picturesque place, standing at about half a mile from the sea, and surrounded by charming grounds. Thus a few miles only would separate Harold from his uncle.

"I think, Harold," said his friend, on the evening of their arrival there, "I ought to write and tell Sir Jasper that you are here, and ask if you may remain with me."

"As you like and think best," said Harold; "but am I not in your way now, Mr. Dunmore?"

"In my way, my dear boy? I don't know what I should do without you! Besides, you are Algy's elder brother, you know."

"Do you think," asked Harold, shyly, "that Mr. Giles Dunmore will ever attempt anything against Algy again?"

"No, I think not; he failed in both cases egregiously, you know. That was enough to discourage him. And in England life is safer than in Sicily. However, we will take good care of the poor child."

Mr. Dunmore wrote to Sir Jasper about his nephew, and in due time received his reply. He was happy to let Harold continue with Mr. Dunmore; but he declined to comply with that gentleman's request that he might provide a tutor for the lad. He (Sir Jasper) considered that Harold was quite educated enough.

"My nephew," he wrote, "will never need to pass an examination, and that (as I understand) is now the sole object of education. Harold is a good arithmetician, writes a good letter—I have had two excellent ones from him since he accompanied you to India,—and has much general knowledge—enough for his future position. Moreover, I am quite unable to pay anything for him. I can offer him a home and board here; but I cannot pay for him elsewhere."

Mr. Dunmore laughed and frowned over this letter. He was disgusted yet amused by the miser's excuses. However, he determined that Harold should not suffer from his uncle's avarice. He therefore informed the boy that he had engaged the curate of his parish, a young man, who had taken high honours at Oxford, to give him daily lessons. Harold would have to go to Mr. Welsh's lodgings for them; but the village was only a mile from the Rockery (Mr. Dunmore's place). Harold was warm in his thanks to this kindest friend. He had longed for better teaching; now he would have it. And he set out for the first time to his tutor's with a glad heart.

Meantime a career had to be found for Dick by his

aunt, who had been most anxious to do all in her power to start him in one.

Her influence with a great mercantile firm in London secured at last for poor Dick a stool in their office, and by-and-bye, perhaps, Dr. Lovelace and herself would be able to purchase a share of the business for him. The lad felt miserable, however, at the idea of being bound to an office in the city. What a contrast it was to the delightful life of excitement and change he had recently enjoyed! He almost wished that he had never left England with his uncle. But Dick was a boy who possessed great strength of character, and a strong though simple sense of duty. "He had to do it," he said; and he did it—that is, he went cheerfully to London, and did his best in the office when he reached it. His father had found a home for him in the house of a surgeon's widow, who took boarders. She had some young sons and daughters, who were musical and pleasant, and Dick had no cause to complain of lack of comfort. But, oh, it was so dull! Often the tigers and panthers of Assam, or the picturesque brigands of Sicily, came between his thoughts and the line of figures he was totting up. But he put the remembrance resolutely aside. It was his duty to think of something else, and Dick would do his duty at all costs.

Harold spent every day till three o'clock with his tutor, then he generally rode with Mr. Dunmore and Algy, for whom his guardian had bought a Shetland pony, and who promised to prove a good horseman.

Harold was still devotedly fond of his little charge, and Algy thought there never was any one so grand as "Halald." He would run after the lad incessantly while he was at home, and often begged to walk with him to the village, with Sambo to escort him back, Mr. Dunmore having brought the negro home with him.

Nothing had been heard of Algy's enemy Giles. Mr. Dunmore had only mentioned him twice: once when Harold questioned him, and the second time when he saw the announcement of his own return to the Rockery in the *Morning Post*. Then he said pettishly,

"I wish these gossiping papers would let one alone! I did not want Giles to know that we were here."

And Harold thought he looked anxious for some days afterwards. However, nothing followed the announcement, and his anxiety appeared to pass away.

"Halald, Halald!" cried Algy, one hot June day; "won't you tum into the hay-field with me and make heaps? Oh, do come, Halald!"

But Harold, who had joined a band of cricketers, was engaged that afternoon to play with them on the common; so he was obliged to free himself from little Algy's clinging hands, and run off. Algy was inclined at first to cry; but very soon the delight of tossing the hay on his little pitchfork more than consoled him. He made a great "heap" as he called the haycock he had formed, and then amused himself by throwing hay over Benedetta, who was seated on a haycock close to where he played; but this last amusement soon lost its charm of teazing, because Benedetta—overpowered by the heat, and soothed by the "swish! swish!" of the scythes—had fallen fast asleep over her knitting, and was cross when he tried to wake her. It suddenly occurred to Algy at last that it would be "fun" to go and meet Harold: the lane outside the hay-field led to the common: why should he not go? He shook Benedetta, and said,

"I 'm doing to meet Halald, Bena."

But she only gave a grunt in reply. Algy, however, thought it quite sufficient consent, and set off at once, running down the lane as fast as his little feet would carry him.

When Bena woke and did not see the child, she called loudly for him, and receiving no answer, went to look for him; but she could not find him in the hay-field. Greatly alarmed, she ran to ask the haymakers, who were cutting the grass at the other end of the large meadow, if they had seen the child, but they had not noticed him for a long time. Then Benedetta went out to look for him in the lane; and bethinking her that Algy might have gone after Mr. Harold, she ran towards the common.

The common was a very large one, and the cricketers were at the farthest end of it; but Benedetta crossed it at full speed, and perceiving Harold, hurried up to him, and asked breathlessly,

"Oh, Mr. Harold, have you seen the child?"

Harold had not, and was greatly startled at the news of Algy's disappearance; he instantly gave up his place in the game to another lad, and hurried back with Benedetta. As they reached the edge of the common he exclaimed,

"Hallo! the gipsies' van and tents, which were here when I passed before, are gone."

And he increased his speed to the house, leaving Benedetta to follow, and running his swiftest. Mr. Dunmore was greatly distressed at his news.

"The gipsies must be instantly followed," he said; "we will pursue them at once, Harold—order our horses."

And they succeeded in a couple of hours in overtaking the gipsies, who stopped at their request and permitted them to search the van. But no Algy was there, and the wanderers declared that they had not seen him.

"Harold," said Mr. Dunmore, as they rode, disappointed, back, "we must employ the police. It is very unpleasant to drag one's family name into public, but I must frustrate this infamous scheme of Giles—I firmly believe this is again his doing. We must do it for Algy's sake. I will

ride on into the town and set the police to work, and I will telegraph for a good detective from London. You must go home, dear lad, and do your best to get some clue to his fate there."

But no clue to the place where the lost child was could be found, and Mr. Dunmore himself started for London that night. He would see Giles himself, and tax him with the abduction of Algernon.

But on reaching Mr. Giles Dunmore's chambers in the Albany in the early morning, he found that his cousin was not in England. The servant asserted that his master had left town for Paris the night before.

"Are you sure of that?" asked Mr. Dunmore.

"Quite sure, sir, for I saw him off by the train."

"Had he any one with him?"

"No, sir, no one."

"Can you give me his address in Paris?"

The servant could, and produced it at once. It was at an apartment in the Elysées.

"You are certain," repeated Mr. Dunmore, "that he had not a child with him?"

"Yes, sir; I am certain he had not."

"I am in search of little Sir Algernon Dunmore, who has been taken away from his home," said Mr. Dunmore. "I would give a hundred pounds for any tidings of him."

"I would gladly give them to you, sir, if I could, then," replied the man, smiling; "but I have seen nothing of the young gentleman."

Mr. Dunmore saw and engaged a London detective, then went to the station and started by the next mail train to Paris. He was at his cousin's apartment early the next morning, and found Giles at breakfast.

"So," said Giles, rising and holding out his hand, "you are returned from your voyage. I am glad to see you again. Sit down and have some breakfast."

"No," said Mr. Dunmore, not taking his cousin's hand; "I come not as a friend, but on business. Giles, what have you done with Algernon?"

"With Algernon? I have never seen the brat. What do you mean?" asked Giles, flushing darkly.

"You cannot deceive me," said Mr. Dunmore. "You stole the proofs of his birth, which were only recovered by a happy chance, or, I ought to say, Providence; then you had him carried away by brigands, and ordered him to be murdered; now you have stolen him again."

Giles Dunmore turned pale as his cousin spoke. He was quite unaware that his doings in Sicily were known; especially his orders to the captain. How could Henry have learnt it? However, he would not acknowledge it.

"I confess," he said, "I got possession of the papers you name; but it was with no felonious intent. I meant only to have them fairly examined, so that your absurd Quixotry should not injure me as well as yourself. I am still convinced that they are forged, and that the boy is an unconscious impostor."

"Why, then, do you not dispute his claim openly and in the law courts, instead of being guilty of dastardly crimes?" asked Mr. Dunmore, sternly.

"I have been guilty of no crimes. How could I prevent the Sicilian brigands stealing the child? He was not their only captive, I daresay. As to their story of my complicity—why, I should have risked my own liberty had I held any private communication with them. It is absurd!"

"As the member of a secret society to which their captain belonged, you ran no risk; nay, you could command his obedience to any real or pretended orders from it," said Henry Dunmore. He was struck, as he spoke, by Giles's pallor and startled look; he saw that he had made an impression. "Giles," he said, "I am about now

to do what I have hitherto shrunk from on account of the disgrace it will be to our family. I shall employ the police, and bring the whole story before a London magistrate—unless you tell me instantly where Algy is."

"I can with truth swear to you that I don't know," replied Giles, sullenly. "As to a magistrate, you will do as you please; but you will be unable to prove anything against me, and will only make yourself a laughing-stock." Then he approached the bell, and rang.

"You will excuse me," he said haughtily, "if I decline to hold any further conversation with you."

Henry Dunmore turned away in silence, and left the room.

But he went straight to the Prefecture of Police, told his tale—which did not appear at all singular to those experienced men—and engaged their services to watch his cousin, and, if possible, to find the child. That evening he again started for England.

The ticket-office clerk observed to a porter, as Mr. Dunmore left, after taking his ticket,

"Those Messieurs must be twin brothers, they are so much alike. It is hard to tell one from the other," alluding to a passenger who had just passed.

But Mr. Dunmore never suspected that his cousin Giles travelled in the same train with himself.

It was a late journey, and quite dark before they reached Calais. Just as they were close to the station, and as Mr. Dunmore was shutting up his paper—he could no longer see to read—there came a violent crash, loud and terrible outcries, and he found himself jammed in between the wrecks of his shattered carriage; his arm a good deal hurt and cut, and his face also, by splinters. It was a railway collision.

His injuries were not serious, however, and when at last he was released from the wrecked carriage, he found

that, though shaken, cut, and bruised, he had no limbs broken. But those in front of the train, up to the very carriage before his own, were either dreadfully wounded or killed.

As Mr. Dunmore was mournfully passing through the bodies, not yet even all placed on the platform, he heard a faint cry of "Henry!" and turning at it, and looking down, met the eyes of his cousin Giles staring at him with a look of agony. He called for help immediately, and the desperately injured man was carefully carried into one of the waiting-rooms, all of which were now full of sufferers. One of the doctors came to him at once, but shook his head as he turned to Mr. Dunmore.

"Both legs crushed," he said: "spine injured. He cannot live many minutes."

Giles, his hearing quickened by anxiety, heard the words, though spoken in a low tone, and cried again faintly, "Henry!" Mr. Dunmore approached him, and bent over him.

"Am I dying?" asked Giles faintly.

"My dear cousin, you are in great danger," he replied. "Oh, Giles! pray—pray for forgiveness, even at this eleventh hour, and make atonement if you can!"

"I don't—believe—it—is any—use," gasped Giles; "but I will atone—as—far—as I can. The boy—was—stolen—by—my order,—and was—to—be lost—in—London—not hurt. The man—who—took him—is——"

His voice ceased, a frightful spasm contorted his face, and Giles Dunmore was dead. When he wished to atone for his sins, he could not do so,—it was too late.

Mr. Dunmore was much more shocked than we can express at this frightful ending of a man whose evil life had closed thus suddenly. He was the more distressed because the miserable Giles had not been able to give him the clue to little Algy's abductor. Poor little fellow!

lost in London! What terrible sufferings those words might imply!

He telegraphed at once to the London detective, and to Harold to go up to the former, and give him a photograph of the poor little boy. He could not leave Calais before the unhappy Giles was in his coffin.

But there was no cause for delay beyond that of the inquiry into the accident. Mr. Dunmore was rich enough to pay well for everything, and the third day after the railway accident the coffin of Giles Dunmore was taken on board the steamer on its road to England. His generous cousin would henceforth keep the secret of his wickedness, and give his remains a place in the ancestral vault. But though Mr. Dunmore sent on the dismal *cortège*, with his servant in attendance, as soon as they reached London he remained himself in town, to see the detectives and Harold, and to ask if any trace had been found of the poor little baronet. But no clue had been discovered.

However, the police were very active, stimulated by a large reward, and Harold, who looked pale and unhappy and had been traversing the streets all the morning and hurrying after every child resembling Algy, was resolved to find the lost boy. Mr. Dunmore felt that he could trust the search for a time to him, and (though reluctantly) went down to the Rockery to bury his wicked kinsman.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LOST CHILD.

DICK had just left his office at four o'clock that day, when he was startled by feeling a hand laid on his shoulder, and turning, he saw Harold beside him.

"Harold," he cried, delighted, "who would have thought of seeing you? I am jolly glad!"

"Still a slangy individual," said Harold, smiling. "Can you come and dine with me at my hotel, Dick, this evening?"

"With great pleasure, of course. Are you all in London, then?"

"No, only myself and Sambo. We have lost poor little Algy; that wicked Giles Dunmore has had him stolen away, and turned adrift, as Lance would say, in London. But come along, I will tell you as we walk. But please look at every beggar child we pass, there's a good fellow; I've been doing it ever since one o'clock."

The boys walked on, and Harold told Dick the story our readers know. The boy was indignant.

"I never heard of such a villain," he said. "It is a precious good thing he was smashed in the railway, *I* think, or he might have 'removed' Mr. Dunmore by-and-bye."

"Mr. Dunmore thinks it very awful that he should have died, as he did, in the midst of his wickedness," said Harold, gravely.

"My dear fellow, if he had lived to the age of Methuselah he would have been no better; old age didn't improve the wicked giants before the Flood, and it would not have improved Mr. Giles Dunmore—a man who could be cruel to a child!" And Dick clenched his fist at the thought.

"But, of course everything is ordered right. I only wish he could have told the name of the rascal who took little Algy away," he continued.

"Yes; that is the awful part of it. Do you think we shall ever find him?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"It is very much like the proverbial needle in the bundle of hay," he said; "but we must hope."

Harold had installed himself, by Mr. Dunmore's order, at the Grand Hotel, and thither the boys were proceeding. As they went, they looked carefully at every child of Algy's size, but did not see the dear little face they both loved. They dined together, and promised to meet at Dick's office at one the next day, when he went out to luncheon; but meantime he proposed a walk in search of Algy; and they traversed the streets running out of the Strand, their hopes more than once raised, to be disappointed, by the number of little ragged children in Villiers Street. However, they did *not* find Algy, and by-and-bye Dick was obliged to take an omnibus to Kensington, where he lived, and they had to say good night.

The next morning's papers all contained an advertisement, offering a hundred pounds to the man who took the little Sir Algernon away if he would restore him, and the same sum to any one who would give information about him.

But advertisement and search alike were fruitless, and yet the child was really at no great distance from them.

It is time that we told our readers what had become of the boys' little pet.

As he was running down the lane that summer day to meet or find Harold, a gipsy man suddenly met him, and asked him who he was. Rather awed by the dark stern face of his interrogator, the child answered, "Sir Algernon Dunmore," as his nurse had taught him in case of the boy's being accidentally lost. The man instantly caught him and raised him in his arms. Algy screamed shrilly, but the fellow put his great hand over the rosy little mouth, and sternly told him that if he made any more noise he would "wring his neck." Algy did not understand what wringing his neck meant, but the incomprehensibility rendered the threat only the more terrible, and he sat silent and trembling on the gipsy's arm. His captor, after a hurried pause at the camp to tell the gipsies to move onwards, bore him swiftly along till they reached a railway station. Before he entered it, however, the gipsy again repeated his threats, and poor little Algy feared to disobey him. Thus he was borne into a third-class carriage unseen by the porters, and was soon steaming away to London. During the journey Algy fell fast asleep, and when he awoke, found himself on a pallet in a cellar in one of the worst parts of London. It was dark, but there was a scrap of fire in the stove, and an old woman crouching over it.

"Nurse!" cried the waking child, "nurse! Benedetta."

"Well, what is it?" said the crone, rising, and going over to him.

"I want Benedetta," sobbed Algy; "I want my nurse."

"There ain't no 'Detter here; but you be a good child, and I 'll take care of you," said the old woman.

"But I want to go home," wailed the boy.

"Oh! you can't go home; this is home now. Here,

do you want your tea?" she asked, taking a small black teapot off the hob.

"No," sobbed Algy, "I don't have tea; I have—milk—and—water," sobbing.

"Well, then, you shall have a cup of tea for a treat." And she took the little fellow's hand and led him to the table.

Algy, though frightened, was rather pleased at being allowed to have real tea instead of milk and water, and drank the horrible decoction presented to him as if it had been nectar. As he was hungry, he also gladly ate the dry bread she gave him. Then he sat by the few embers, and the old woman told him a ghastly story of a man she called "Cruel Tom," a tale which haunted and disturbed the poor child's sleep for many years afterwards, returning to him often in dreams.

The next morning she dressed him in miserable and dirty rags, and took him out with her to beg. In vain the boy demanded his own clothes, and cried, and tried to tear off his filthy garments. A hard blow on his back, a cruel shaking, soon subdued him, and he went out with his mistress, sobbing in a manner she deemed very effective; as she was able to say, while whining for relief to a kind-looking lady,

"The poor babe is crying with hunger, good lady: he has had nothing to eat for two days."

And the great beauty and evident distress of the child brought many pennies to the crone's pocket.

But Algy had understood enough *not* to cry the next day while they were out—not even when she pinched him. He knew that she would "tell stories" about why he cried; so he kept back his tears resolutely, and as firmly refused to beg when desired to do so. Nay, as he made an attempt once or twice to tell the passers-by that he was "Algy," and that "he wanted to go home,"

the woman thought it dangerous to take him farther, and returned home, where she administered a good whipping to poor little Algy, "in punishment," as she said, "of his disobedience." He was also refused tea and supper, and had to go hungry and in pain to his wretched bed.

Several days passed on; the child was again taken out, but again would not beg, and only held out his hand silently when made do so by a blow, and stared stupidly at the person solicited.

Dame Grimes was at her wits' end with him.

"He is the contrariest vermin I ever saw," she declared to her gipsy son when he entered the cellar about a week afterwards: "he won't beg, nor even cry, as he did at first; and yet I whack him pretty nigh every night. He won't be no good, Jack."

"No," said the gipsy, sullenly, "he won't, for the cove that was to have give us thirty pounds a year to take care on him is dead—smashed up in a railway haccident—so no more money will come from him."

"Ain't there bin any reward offered for the child?" asked the crone, artfully. "He must be the son of rich gentlefolks, I think, by his clothes—they fetched a deal—and he calls hisself *Sir* Halgernon."

"Yes, there 's a hundred pounds reward offered for him, but how can we get it? If it was known I kidnapped a swell's child, I should have a precious long time in gaol, and no money can make up for that, mother, to a gipsy."

"Why, no, it can't. I wish as you had never undertook the job, Jack."

"Oh, I dunno. I bagged a good bit of money down, you know, and maybe we may manage to get the reward by-and-bye. We must wait; mayhap they 'll raise it too. Keep him in a bit, mother."

And now Algy was kept strictly in the house, and never allowed to breathe the air. He had one consolation.

The family who lived upstairs had a little girl a year or two older than himself. This child used to run down to do odd jobs sometimes for the old woman whom she called Mrs. Grimes; and Mrs. Grimes being desirous of getting out to the public house occasionally—indeed, from habit, she nearly lived in the streets—engaged to give Nancy a penny a week, if she would take care of Algy, and not let him go out of doors. Nancy was glad to accept the employment, for she had taken a fancy to the pretty little boy, and she liked to play with him.

Now, Nancy's father was a dealer in birds, and she thought it would please Algy to let him look at and listen to their captives, and consequently she took him upstairs (that was not out of doors, she said) to show him a parrot her father had lately bought of a sailor, and which could say many words. And Algy was delighted with his visit, for (strange to say) the parrot cried "Algy" and "Lance," and called out, "Avast there!" just as Lance's parrot had done in the tea country. The child was sure, he said, he knew the parrot, and the parrot seemed to know him; but the girl persisted that he could not know it: it had come very lately from over the sea.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PARROT.

ONE day as Harold and Dick were passing down by Whitehall, they came face to face with Lance, issuing from the Admiralty. The exclamation of surprise at the meeting was mutual.

"Who would have thought of seeing you, Lance!" cried Harold.

"Well, yes, I dare say you are surprised," he replied; "but I was ordered home, and have had to report myself at the Admiralty."

"I hope they were pleased to see you," said Dick.

"Delighted! They feel that the navy is safe now I have returned to it. But how came you fellows to be in London?"

"I live here now, to my sorrow," sighed Dick, "but Harold is here in search of poor little Algy."

And the story of Algy's loss was soon told. Lance was distressed and indignant. The boys had all loved the pretty innocent little fellow.

"I 'll help you seek for him," he exclaimed: "I have a week's leave before I join my new ship: she isn't ready. I will spend it helping you look for him. We shall find him, I am convinced. When did WE THREE fail?"

The boys took Lance back to the hotel, where he was warmly welcomed by Mr. Dunmore, and invited to stay with them there. We need not say the invitation was

gladly accepted, and Lance sent for his portmanteau from the hotel where he had slept.

"Have you searched Seven Dials well?" he asked the next morning at breakfast.

"The police have been there," replied Mr. Dunmore, "and offered large rewards, but without success."

"Let me have a try at it," said Lance; "I want to go there, so I have an excuse for prying about. In landing at Southampton, my parrot, cage and all, was stolen from amongst my traps on the landing-place. I want to buy another, for I think they are pleasant pets, so that can be my excuse for going into the bird-shops."

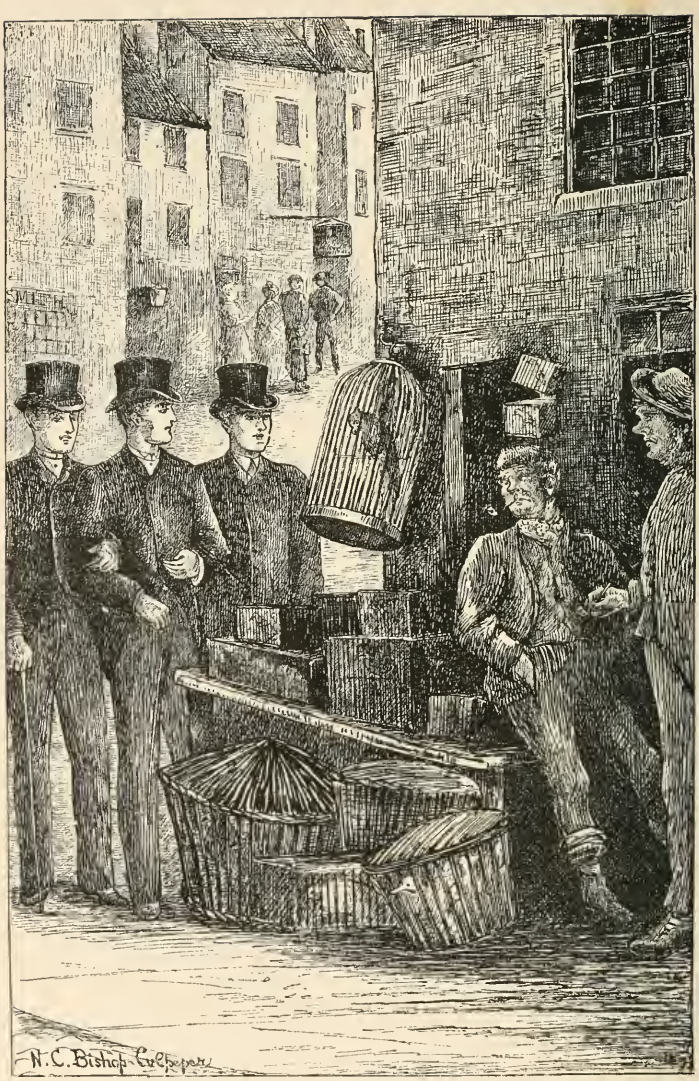
"We will go," decided Harold, "and fetch Dick to accompany us at his luncheon hour."

They did as they had resolved—met Dick, and started all three on their explorations. What a queer place they thought Seven Dials was! In one street were heaps and heaps of old shoes, mended up, and put out for sale in even rows, along the cellar shutters. They peeped about here and everywhere, but the cellars seemed pretty open, and Lance proposed trying the birds. They soon found themselves in a street which seemed consecrated to the captivity of the pretty woodland songsters. There were cages innumerable. From some the plaintive song of the caged skylark made the country boy, Harold, shudder with indignation; from others came the pretty note of the chaffinch, or a bullfinch piped a sorrowful "God save the Queen."

"I declare," said Harold, "I long to open all the cages and let the birds out. Whenever I can afford it I will buy them all and set them free."

"They would instantly be replaced by others," observed Dick.

A man here came out of the shop, and asked what they were pleased to want.



LANCE FINDS HIS PARROT

"Have you a humdergun?" asked Lance, gravely.

"Not at present, sir. Foreign bird, sir? I daresay I can get it for you."

"No, we can't wait—we want it immediately," said Lance.

"Foreign bird dealer a little farther on, sir," said the man: "first turning to the left down a court."

The boys thanked him and went on. The court they entered was narrow and very dirty. Some ill-looking rough men were standing about, leaning against the walls and smoking; dirty children played on the steps of the doors.

"It looks a villanous neighbourhood," said Harold.

"Yes," replied Lance; "but it is the more likely to hide poor little Algy. Keep your eyes about you."

They walked on, and were about half-way down the court when suddenly they heard a shrill bird-voice crying,

"Lance! Lance! What cheer, my hearty!" Lance stood still, amazed, and looked about him. "Breakers ahead!" shouted the same voice.

"Poll's voice, or I 'm a Dutchman!" exclaimed Lance. "So, my lady, I 've found you."

And he whistled "The Little Midshipmite," which Poll instantly echoed very distinctly.

The sound came from a shop close to them, in which a few foreign birds were exhibited in the window: a wretched shabby-looking cockatoo, some small green paroquets, a ragged-looking macaw, and a grey parrot, who of the whole assembly of birds was the only one in a handsome cage.

Lance instantly entered the shop, followed by his companions, and went up to the parrot.

"Well, old lass, how are you?" he said, putting his face close to the bars, "Polly dear!"

The recognition seemed mutual, for at the sound of

Lance's voice the parrot came down against the bars of her cage, put her head gently against his cheek, and made the sound of violent kissing. It was convincing proof enough for Lance.

"Hi, here! Ship ahoy!" he cried, laughing; and the parrot screamed in echo to him,

"Ship ahoy! Look alive, my hearties!"

At these calls a man came from an inner room, looking a little startled.

"Where did you get this parrot?" asked Lance.

"That parrot, sir? Bought it of a seaman come from the Coast of Africa, sir," he said nervously.

"It is my bird," declared Lance, decidedly. "He must have stolen it, cage and all."

"Bee, Bee, what a beautee!" cried the parrot.

"I taught her those words, and I claim the bird," went on Lance, "as my own property."

The man's face darkened.

"I ain't a-goin' to give her up to you, then," he said, sullenly. "I give a good sum for her, and I've only your word that she belongs to you. She talks like a seaman's bird."

"*I* am a seaman," said Lance.

"More like a rascally schoolboy," sneered the bird-dealer.

"No impertinence, sir," said Lance sternly, and with an air of command, "or I will call the police. These young gentlemen with me also recognize the bird."

The man changed his tone.

"Well, sir," he said, "I gave the blue-jacket two pound for it, and it's worth more. You wouldn't hurt a poor man. How could I know the man had stolen it? I'll let you have it at a reduction, sir—say a pound."

At this moment they were interrupted by a succession of the most piercing screams, and from the inner room

darted a ragged dirty child, pursued by a tall man, who at sight of the boys sprang forward and shut the shop-door.

"Come along, you young varmint," he growled, seizing the child by its arm as it stood looking dazed at the boys, "come along." And he slapped it on the back.

But it burst from him, rushed to Harold, and clasped his knees, crying, "Halald, Halald! I 'm Algy!"

And Harold caught him up in his arms, and discovered in the face, black with dirt and tears, the matted hair and thin starved little form, his well-loved but at first not recognized pet.

"Algy, my dear little soul!" he cried. "This child belongs to me," he added, addressing the men.

"Well, that 's a pretty go," said the bird-dealer: "one of these boys claims my parrot, and now t'other claims your son, Jack."

"But he ain't goin' to have him," said the gipsy, ferociously. And he advanced to pull the little child out of Harold's arms.

But Lance interfered. "Touch him if you dare!" he cried, planting himself before Harold.

The tall gipsy raised his arm and levelled a blow at Lance, which might have crushed him; but the boy understood how to use his fists scientifically—he parried it, and delivered one at his opponent which stretched him on the floor in a moment.

"Open the door, Dick," he shouted, leaping over his fallen foe.

But Dick had already attempted to do so, and been instantly assaulted by the bird-dealer, who was encouraged by the example of his villanous companion to attack the boys, with an ultimate intention probably of robbery. The fallen giant was raising himself meantime; his fall had been severe but had not stunned him, and there was no time to lose.

Lance rushed to Dick's rescue, and attacked the bird-seller, and Dick, who was nearest to the door, opened it, and, going outside, shouted for the police. Harold had also sprung over the prostrate giant. He now rushed past Dick's former opponent, and darted into the street with the child in his arms, shouting "Police!" But no policeman was visible, and though Lance had also fought his way out, the man pursued him, calling for help, and several of the ill-looking roughs loafing in the court were obeying the summons.

The boys looked round in some dismay, and Lance and Dick, calling on Harold to run on with Algy, faced their approaching and growling foes gallantly, though a stone struck Dick's forehead and cut it open.

They were in considerable danger, for the entrance to the court was at some little distance, when suddenly their pursuers drew off, darted away, and disappeared. Looking back to see what had caused this sudden change of tactics, Lance perceived that a party of police and Mr. Dunmore were entering the court. The lads gave a glad cheer and rushed to meet them.

"Just in time," gasped Lance. "We have had some ugly customers; but we have found Algy!"

And then, while Mr. Dunmore welcomed with great pity his poor little ward, the boys led the police back to the shop, where the parrot was still screaming "Lance."

The parrot was secured for Lance by them, and the men threatened; but, for the sake of his dead cousin's name, Mr. Dunmore would not have the gipsy arrested; and Lance declared that the bird-dealer was enough punished by the loss of the bird.

"But how did you find us, Mr. Dunmore, and come so in the nick of time?" he asked, as they drove home in a cab.

"Well, after you boys left, I grew uneasy about you:

the neighbourhood is not good here, so I thought I would follow you, and did so almost immediately. Luckily for you I went, on entering the street, to the first bird-shop which you had visited; heard from the man, who is civil and honest, that three young gentlemen had called a short time before in search of a bird called a humdergun" (he laughed, and added in parenthesis, "I recognized Lance in this singular naturalist") "and that he had sent them to the only person likely to have a bird of which he had never heard. 'But,' he added, 'the seller lives down Bell Court, which is rather a bad neighbourhood, and perhaps it would be as well, sir, if you looked after them.'

"Then," went on Mr. Dunmore, "I called a policeman, who summoned another that happened to be near, and we followed you, meeting a group of police who were going to arrest some roughs actually residing in this very court; and thus we came providentially to your rescue."

Sambo and Benedetta, who were both at the hotel, and who had been aiding in the long search, received Algy with cries of rapture; though the tender-hearted Italian shed many tears over the poor little child, when, on bathing him, she saw that he was a mere skeleton, and covered with bruises. But she did her best to relieve him and make him comfortable, and, after a good meal of boiled chicken and toast and water, he was put to bed, and soon fell into a profound slumber.

"Harold, we should never have found the poor little fellow if it had not been for Lance," said Dick, at dinner that day. His forehead had been dressed and bound up, and Mr. Dunmore had called on his employers and begged a week's holiday for him on account of the wound; it had been granted at once.

"And Lance's parrot," laughed the midshipman, "Poll, has proved to be worth her weight in gold."

"Good bird," cried the parrot from its cage in the window. "Poll would like some tea."

"She is a very clever bird indeed, and ought to be entered into the detective force," said Harold.

Mr. Dunmore was now desirous to return home, and the boys had to part from Lance—Dick was to accompany Harold.

"Oh, if we never had to part, what might we not do!" cried Dick, theatrically; "'we three' always succeed in every undertaking, do we not, Mr. Dunmore?"

Mr. Dunmore laughed and said that it really seemed so.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BURGLARS.

MR. DUNMORE would not have the gipsy arrested, as we have said; he wished to spare the memory of his dead cousin; but he hastened to leave London, and to carry back his rather trying little ward to his country home.

Here things resumed their usual routine, and no circumstance of any kind happened to break the happy monotony of daily life. Thus November closed, and the short dark days of December arrived. Dick was to spend his Christmas at Pengarven, and the boys were rejoiced at the prospect of meeting again.

On the twenty-second of December, however, Sambo entered with a letter, which he said the gardener at the Raven's Nest had brought for Massa Harold. Harold took it in great surprise. Sir Jasper never wrote letters (except to his brokers), he thought them a waste of time and money; therefore it must, Harold thought, be something very important that made him write. He opened the letter and read these words:

"DEAR NEPHEW,—I am glad to receive such good accounts of you from your friend Mr. Dunmore. He is a rich man—very rich, I hear—and I hope he will leave you his money. I am glad you try to please him. Now, my dear boy, I want you to ask him to spare you to me

for a little while. The burglaries in this neighbourhood have recently been frequent and alarming, and I am getting uneasy about the Raven's Nest, though, as you well know, I have nothing worth their coming here for, I am too poor. However, I should feel more comfortable if you would come here and be a companion to me these dark evenings. I shall be glad also if you can persuade Mr. Dunmore to let you bring with you that honest and brave negro of whom you wrote me such a pleasant account. Your gun will keep the table well supplied for us all, I have no doubt. Answer me by bearer at once.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"JASPER SINCLAIR."

It was with the bitterest disappointment that Harold read these words. He had been going to stay at Dr. Lovelace's the very next day! Mr. Dunmore observed his change of expression—they were at luncheon—and said,

"Your uncle is not ill, I hope, Harold?"

"No," said Harold, "but he is afraid of burglars, and he wants me to go there at once, to keep him company, as the servants say; and I was going to Dick's to-morrow."

"It is vexatious, but I think you ought to go to your uncle whenever he wishes you to do so. He has a right to keep you with him always, remember, if he pleased."

"And he wishes me to take Sambo with me, if you can spare him," added Harold, despondently.

"Then probably he only requires you for a short visit," said Mr. Dunmore, smiling; "he would not care to keep you both long."

"No, but I wanted so much to go to Dick's. We were to have acted charades on Twelfth Night, and I had to rehearse my part with them, you know."

"It is a disappointment, no doubt, my dear lad, but we

must never give up a duty for pleasure; and who knows? you may be with Dick on Twelfth Night after all."

"Well," said Harold, with a sigh, "I suppose I must not grumble, but 'grin and bear it,' as Dick says."

"Ring the bell," replied his friend: "we will see the gardener, and hear, perhaps, more about the matter."

Jordan, an old servant of the Sinclairs, and a man of advanced age himself, appeared when summoned, and told them that Sir Jasper had not been at all like himself lately; that he had grown very nervous, was always prowling about the house at night and examining the shutters, and that Mrs. Brown said he ate next to nothing. Mr. Dunmore looked grave.

"And," went on Jordan, "there have been a deal of housebreaking round the neighbourhood lately. I mostly sleeps at the house now."

Mr. Dunmore was sorry for Harold's disappointment, but said that it was his duty to obey his uncle at once; and Harold therefore scribbled a line to Sir Jasper to say that he would be with him in a few hours. He started an hour afterwards in Mr. Dunmore's carriage, borrowing a pistol of him before he left, and arrived at Raven's Nest just before Sir Jasper's dinner-hour.

His uncle received him very cordially, almost gladly; but Harold was shocked at the change a year had made in him. He was a perfect skeleton, and his eyes looked feverishly bright.

"I have not been very well," he said, in answer to Harold's inquiries as to his health; "I have been obliged to send for Dr. Lovelace: an awful expense," with a groan, "but he attends me for as low a sum as any other would. I am expecting him to come in every minute."

"I am glad of that," said Harold, "for then I can explain why I shall not be able to accept Dick's invitation for Christmas."

Sir Jasper looked pleased.

"So," he said, "you gave up your Christmas jollities for me? Good boy! Mrs. Brown shall make you a Christmas pudding for doing so."

The fact was that Sir Jasper had missed his nephew greatly since his departure; and only the hope of Harold's securing Mr. Dunmore's fortune by-and-bye, and the fact of that gentleman's educating the lad, had prevented him from recalling his young kinsman long ago.

A few minutes after Harold's arrival, Dr. Lovelace's carriage drove up. He was surprised to see Harold, yet glad.

"I am sorry, for Dick's sake as well as our own," he said, "that you cannot be with us, Harold, this Christmas; but Sir Jasper really needs you, and I am rejoiced for his sake that you are here. You will sleep soundly, Sir Jasper," he went on to his patient, "now that you have this young tiger-slayer to protect your slumbers."

Sir Jasper smiled assent.

"Yes, yes," he replied, "and we have the negro here also—Sambo."

That evening Harold had to relate to his uncle the many and strange adventures that had been crowded into a year; and Sir Jasper listened with delighted attention. He had not been so well amused for a long time, and he wished Harold good night almost affectionately.

"Your room is not your old one," he said; "I have had a bed put for you in my dressing-room, so that we may be together; it 's safer."

Before Harold went to his room, however, he paid a visit to Mrs. Brown, who was enchanted to see her dear young master again.

"You ain't grown much taller, Mr. Harold," she said, "you got all your height at once; but you are browned a good deal, and look a deal more manly too. It is a real

pleasure to see you home again, sir. And that negro!—well, really, he is a good joke. The tales he told us made my hair stand on end almost. What you have gone through! Well, thanks be to Providence you 're safe at home again. Those foreign parts are awfully dangerous."

The night passed quietly, and Sir Jasper seemed better the next day for his sleep. He told Harold that he had had to keep awake as a watch-dog must, in case of the house being attempted.

"But why did you not have Ponto in the house?" asked the boy, "he would be a great protection."

"You are right, Harold," cried the old man, eagerly; "you shall go and order him to be brought in at once. You see, I couldn't look after things as you can."

Ponto, a fine retriever, was accordingly introduced to the hall at Raven's Nest, and Harold intended him to sleep in the corridor outside his uncle's door.

Dr. Lovelace arrived on his daily visit shortly after this had been achieved, and, to Harold's great delight, Dick (who had arrived the previous evening) came with him. The lads exchanged affectionate greetings.

"I want to stay with you for a night or two," said Dick. "It *is* true that there are burglars about, and I think I might help keep the castle. Ask Sir Jasper if I may. Father could drive me over every day when he pays his evening visit."

But when Sir Jasper heard of Dick's offer, he, to Harold's great surprise, invited him to stay altogether with Harold for a few days.

"I have deprived Hal of his visit," he said, "we must make up to him as we best can for it. I think if you stay with him, he will be as happy, though not so gay."

Dick gladly accepted the invitation, and as he and Harold purposed having a little shooting, the doctor

promised to send over Dick's gun with his portmanteau in the evening.

The boys had a pleasant day together talking over old times, and Sir Jasper at dinner was most friendly. The evening was stormy and wild, and the wind howled round the old house drearily, but they sat talking to Sir Jasper by the fire, and did not heed it. He went to bed early, but told the boys they need not hurry to retire, and Harold took Dick to see Mrs. Brown before they went up to their rooms. Dick's was ordered in the same corridor. The housekeeper was glad to see Mr. Richard, and brought out some very nice sweetmeats which she begged them to accept; and offered them some warmed elder wine, which they found excellent.

About ten they went up to bed, Ponto's blanket being established in the corridor.

How fiercely the wind howled round the Raven's Nest that night! Yet both the young lads were soon lost in the pleasant and profound slumbers of their age, and their rest was uninterrupted till about one in the morning, when Ponto woke them by barking angrily. Harold sat up in bed and listened. The dog was very angry. He understood all his old pet's barks. He jumped up at once, put on his slippers and dressing-gown, and rang for Sambo, as he had agreed to do on any alarm. Then he went to Dick's room, and found him also ready.

"There is some one in the house," he said to his friend. "Ponto is in a rage—we had better go down and see what it is that vexes him. Ah! here is Sambo," as a door opened into the corridor and the negro appeared. "Now, Sambo, let us go and see what vexes Ponto. Hi, Ponto! seize them!" And he sent the retriever before them at full speed.

There was a noise in the hall, and the dog gave a yelp of pain as if he had received a blow. The next moment

the boys and Sambo were there also, and saw themselves confronted by two masked men armed with pistols. When the robbers perceived the two boys and the negro, they fired—hoping probably in the confusion thus created to escape—but their bullets hit the wall only, and the powerful negro springing on the nearest, disarmed him in a moment; while Harold, aiming very low, fired at the other's legs just as he discharged his second chamber at Dick.

The man fell at once.

"Call for help, Massa Dick!" cried Sambo, who was struggling with the other robber. "Jordan must come and help me secure this rascal."

Dick shouted for help, rang the alarm-bell, and flew to assist Sambo. Jordan very shortly appeared, with the stable-boy, Mrs. Brown, and the girl, all in the greatest alarm and excitement. But very soon, with the gardener's assistance and the clothes-lines, readily found by the little maid, the wounded and unwounded burglars were both secured.

"There 's no chance of getting a doctor for you for an hour or two," said Dick, approaching the wounded man. At that moment Harold snatched off the fellow's mask, and Dick and he exclaimed together,

"Good gracious! it 's Saunders."

Saunders scowled at them and spoke not a word.

"Can you bind up his leg, Dick?" asked the shocked and surprised Harold.

"I 'll try, but Jordan or Sambo had better go at once for my father," was the reply. "He had better lie as he is till father comes. Mrs. Brown will give me a cushion for his head."

The housekeeper brought one immediately, and when the wounded burglar asked for water, she readily attended to his wants.

Just then Sir Jasper's voice was heard at the top of the stairs calling his nephew, and Harold at once ran up to him.

"What is it, Hal?" asked Sir Jasper, tremulously.

"We have secured two burglars, sir, one of whom I have wounded," replied Harold. "Go back into bed, uncle; it will be all right."

"And no one is hurt besides?" asked the old gentleman.

"No one; the shots you heard did no harm to anything but the wall. Jordan and the stable-boy are going for Doctor Lovelace now to attend to the man I wounded; they will fetch the police."

"But you are sure, Hal, that the thieves cannot get loose again—are you?" asked Sir Jasper, trembling.

"One is bound hand and foot very strongly, dear uncle," said the boy, "and the wounded one has his hands tied securely. Sambo and Dick with pistols in their hands are standing guarding them. But what *do* you think? The wounded one is Mr. Dunmore's old valet, Saunders; and the other, the very footpad I knocked down and bound when I went to help Mr. Dunmore, the morning I left home."

"That is astonishing, Harold. How can one be safe when such villains can get into one's own service?"

Harold saw his uncle safely back to bed, and then returned to keep watch with Dick and Sambo.

Dr. Lovelace arrived in due time, and the wounded man was borne to a servant's bed-room and properly attended to. The police arrived shortly afterwards, and carried off his companion.

Sir Jasper was not so well the next morning, naturally, from his night's alarm; but as it was utterly unlikely after such an event that his house would be attacked again, he recovered speedily from the nervous alarm from which he had been lately suffering.

Saunders was very sullen, but in the course of the following day he asked if he might see Mr. Dunmore, and Harold told him that he would ask his friend to grant his request.

Mr. Dunmore called the day after the burglars' arrest, and had an interview with his former valet, from which he came out looking very pale and distressed. He took Harold aside, and told him what Saunders had acknowledged to him.

"It was Giles who first led the man wrong," he said; "he had bribed him to keep him informed of all my proceedings. It was Giles who induced him to set the footpads on me (whenever a chance occurred), that he might find the papers, supposing I had them on my person and not at the bank, of which my cousin was not certain. It was Saunders who wrote and told him we were in Sicily, and thus brought Giles out to try and use the bandits as his tools. In fact, he corrupted my valet. Saunders since he left me, which he did in fear of being found out, has gone from bad to worse. He set up a sort of hotel near Kensington, but kept in his pay several burglars—the fellows you saved me from—the gipsy who stole Algy—and old servants of bad character, who had served in good houses and knew the secrets of plate-rooms and jewel-cases. They brought him the proceeds of their robberies, and received a per-centage on them themselves; a home at his inn, and false characters from him when required. In fact, he declares that he can reveal a whole history of all the recent burglaries, if he is allowed to turn informer."

Harold was shocked.

"It is a good thing I hit him," he said; "now I suppose the robberies will cease for awhile."

And they did; but Sir Jasper was very unwilling to let Harold leave him altogether again, and Mr. Dunmore

thought it the lad's duty to remain with his aged kinsman. So Harold returned permanently to his old home, but was allowed to join in Dick's Christmas festivites.

Saunders and his companion were sentenced to five or ten years' (we forget which) penal servitude; the gang was broken up, and this episode closed Harold's varied adventures.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"Jumping o'er time,
Turning th' accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass." —SHAKESPEARE.

WE must present our readers to the three boys once more. They are young men now, of five and four and twenty, and they are assembled at the Raven's Nest for Christmas.

Sir Jasper died four years ago, and Harold succeeded to the title and estate.

The old house looks very different from that which it used to be under the rule of the old miser. There are great fires everywhere—a yule log in the hall—and Mrs. Brown, in a new silk dress, walks smiling about, seeing that everything is in order.

Sambo, in highly respectable black clothes, and an immaculately white shirt collar, struts about, and is to be seen everywhere. He calls himself Sir Harold's Major Domo.

The house is full of guests. The whole Lovelace family (except Beatrice, who has married Mr. Vivien, and is gone to live amongst the tea), Mrs. Mordaunt, and Ella, now a grown-up young lady, Captain Regan and Lance, and Algy, home from Eton, are all there. And Harold is devoted to them all. He cannot do enough for his friends;

but his eyes rest very often on Edith Lovelace, as Lance's do upon Ella Mordaunt.

Dick is now a partner in the firm, and is a very well off young man; but he does not seem to care much for ladies.

It is Christmas Eve. The hall is gay with wreaths of holly, ivy, and mistletoe. The yule log blazes cheerfully. Before it stand the "three boys," now three men.

"It is good to be together again," says Harold, laying a hand affectionately on the shoulder of each of his friends; "it always forbodes success."

"What need have you of success, Harold?" asked young Commander Regan, with a smile. "You have all you can wish."

"No," said Harold, "not all. Dick's sister is my roc's egg."

"My sister!" cried Dick. "Good gracious!"

"Yes, I want Edith Lovelace to be my wife, Dick, and if she says 'yes,' we shall be brothers in relation as well as in heart. I mean to ask her to-night at the snap-dragon," laughing.

"I feel inclined to take the same opportunity of asking Ella," said Lance, flushing a little.

"Oh, dear!" cried Dick; "and I had hoped we should be three jolly bachelors."

"Nay, Dick, you must marry also, and we shall be three jolly married men."

Sir Harold carried out his intention that evening, and was accepted. Lance had the same success, though Mrs. Mordaunt, when asked, objected to an immediate marriage, but consented to an engagement. Ella was so very young! Lance must make one more voyage before he gained his wife.

It was a merry Christmas for them all.

They skated, shot, hunted, danced, and Algy had a grand boys' party. It seemed a pity that so much plea-

sure should come to an end, as it must; though, if it had lasted, they would no doubt all have wearied of it.

They parted and dispersed the day after the Epiphany. The three boys stood together for a few minutes that morning in the hall.

"Do you know," said Dick, "I think we three compare very favourably with Damon and Pythias, or any other of those old-world fogies. We have been staunch friends for eleven years, and never fallen out in all our trials and adventures. We have proved that union is strength, for we have succeeded in everything at which we worked together."

"A threefold cord is not easily broken," quoted Lance. "I owe my promotion to Sir Harold's interest as an M.P."

"And he advanced me the money to purchase my partnership," said Dick. "Of course I shall pay him again, but it was and is an immense boon to be able to secure the position at the time."

"And I," said Harold, "owe my first and last happiness to Dick and his family, and my life itself to Lance."

"Hurrah, then," cried Dick, "for WE THREE BOYS!"

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